



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Mike Trout blasts 39th homer as Angels open final weekend with victory**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — While the Angels' final weekend of games have little bearing on the present, they opened the series with all sorts of storylines relating to the past and the future.

The Angels' 8-5 victory over the Oakland A's on Friday night included big offensive contributions from rookies Shohei Ohtani and Taylor Ward, the scoreless pitching of rookies Jaime Barría and Taylor Cole, and a closing flourish from Hansel Robles.

It all came against a backdrop of what is likely to be the final weekend for Mike Scioscia after 19 years managing the team.

On Saturday, the Angels will honor Scioscia with a bobblehead, and on Friday the ballpark concourse included at least one ad for the promotion that included a list of the manager's accomplishments.

In between all that, the most significant developments relating to 2018 came from Mike Trout and Ohtani, who are making their final statements in the bid for individual awards.

Ohtani, who had two singles, a double and a sacrifice fly, seems like a good bet to win the AL Rookie of the Year award.

"For my money, he's hands down Rookie of the Year," Scioscia said. "I don't know if anyone's come into this league in a long time and done what he's done. His pitching season was cut short but when he was out there, he was dominant. At the plate, you see the talent. He's having a terrific season."

Ohtani also stole his 10th base of the year. As you'd expect, Ohtani is also the first player in major league history to steal 10 bases, hit 10 homers and start 10 games as a pitcher in the same season. The only other Angels rookies to combine the 10 steals and 20 homers – Ohtani has 22 – were Devon White (1987) and Trout (2012).

Trout was the unanimous Rookie of the Year then, and now he's trying to win his third MVP award.

Trout singled and hit a two-run homer, his 39th of the season. Trout, however, might only be cementing his place as the MVP runner-up – for the fourth time. Mookie Betts is having a season that, by most measures, is equal to Trout's, but he's doing so on a 107-win team going to the playoffs.

The Angels, meanwhile, are going nowhere, but at least feeling good about a four-game winning streak in the final week and the performances of a few players who could be part of the solution in 2019.

Barría, a 22-year-old who began last season at Class-A Inland Empire, has risen quickly to become a reliable member of the rotation. In his 26th start of the season, Barría did not allow a hit or a run. He was knocked out after 4-2/3 innings because he walked six, though.

Barría finished his season with a 3.41 ERA in 129-1/3 innings.

“For his first crack at the major leagues, Jaime did terrific,” Scioscia said. “Tonight, he uncharacteristically totally lost his release point. That’s not the way Jaime can pitch.”

His shot to pitch part of a combined no-hitter ended when Cole gave up a single to Jed Lowrie leading off the sixth. Around that, Cole pitched 2-1/3 innings, striking out five of the eight batters he faced. Signed as a minor league free agent right before spring training, Cole has a 2.75 ERA in 36 innings.

The Angels got the lead with three runs in the second, including two on a homer by Ward, his fifth of the season and second in as many games.

Ward had a rough defensive game. Still learning third base after being a catcher until this year, Ward made an error and had an infield single deflect off his glove in the A’s five-run eighth inning.

Although the lead was sliced to three, Robles finished it off with a dominant ninth, striking out three of the four batters he faced. He also hit 100 mph for the first time with the Angels, and he was consistently at 99 mph. He had been throwing mostly around 97 mph.

Robles, who has a 2.97 ERA in 37 games since the Angels claimed him on waivers, said the adrenaline of the ninth inning helped boost his velocity.

“All my life,” he said through an interpreter, “I’ve wanted to be a closer.”

Justin Upton reflects on a rollercoaster first full season with Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — Although Justin Upton will end his season with his accustomed numbers, he would have preferred a smoother ride.

“I typically like to do it in a different fashion than I did, but that’s how things were,” the Angels outfielder said with a shrug.

Upton is hitting .259 with 30 home runs and an .813 OPS after Friday’s game. His career average is .268 with 28 homers a season and an OPS of .826.

Upton, however, got to those numbers in a turbulent manner. He had a .657 OPS in his first 29 games, followed by a .965 mark over his next 33 games, a .639 over his next 28 games, and then a 1.000 for 32 games. Since coming back from a stint on the disabled list with a finger laceration, he has a .722 mark over his last 21 games.

Upton, 31, said some of his 12 big league seasons have been like that, and he’s not sure why.

He also had no explanation for what has been a consistent area of struggle. Upton has hit .199 with a .657 OPS with runners in scoring position.

"I can't put a finger on that," he said. "Every time I felt I was in a hitter's count, a guy makes a great pitch or I mis-hit something. Things just didn't go my way with guys in scoring position, but somehow I still drove in runs. It's just one of those weird things."

Upton has 85 RBIs, which is tops on the team.

Manager Mike Scioscia said there was some bad luck involved with Upton's issues with runners in scoring position.

"He hit some balls hard (that were caught)," Scioscia said. "He probably hasn't been as productive as he's been in the past in that regard, but he's had a great season."

Upton was the Angels cleanup hitter when the season began, expected to bat between Mike Trout and Albert Pujols. As the year developed, he will end up as the primary No. 5 hitter, behind Trout and Shohei Ohtani. When Pujols is back next year, it seems likely he would hit behind Upton, which could be fifth or sixth, depending on whether Trout is No. 2 or No. 3.

"I guess that's the plan," Upton said of having all four hitters healthy in the middle of the lineup. "It didn't work out for us. Hopefully, next year is a little different."

Upton has four years left on the contract extension he signed last year, getting an extra year on his deal in exchange for passing on his opt-out. Upton is due to make \$18 million next year, and \$90 million over the next four years.

He seems to have no regrets about returning to the Angels instead of becoming a free agent.

"This is a great clubhouse," he said. "We had injuries and didn't play as well as we wanted to, but people are going to come in prepared again next year to chase our goal of getting to the postseason. I enjoyed the season as much as you could. I enjoy the guys. I enjoy the atmosphere. I'm looking forward to next year."

ALSO

Matt Shoemaker will start the season finale on Sunday, regardless of whether the game has any playoff implications for the Oakland A's. Scioscia had a choice of Shoemaker, Felix Peña or even a crew of relievers. He opted against Peña because he's already thrown 126 innings between the minors and majors, about double what he threw last year as a reliever in the Cubs' system. Peña finishes his season with a 4.18 ERA, including 4.00 in his 17 starts. Scioscia said Peña "had a great run for us. He learned a lot."

UP NEXT

Angels (LHP Tyler Skaggs, 8-9, 3.91) vs. A's (TBA), Saturday, 6 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**Angels pitcher Felix Peña emerges as candidate for '19 rotation**

By Maria Torres

The Angels, like so many other teams, will enter spring training searching — for a shutdown relief corps, a third-base solution, a lineup configuration that can feature both Shohei Ohtani and Albert Pujols without compromising the younger player's development.

And again they'll look for a viable rotation, one they'll hope this time won't spontaneously combust.

They've already found a legitimate candidate in right-hander Felix Peña, whose first season with steady turns in a major-league rotation ended this week in a no-decision in the Angels' extra-innings win over the Rangers on Monday. Peña, 28, will not get another start despite falling in line for the season finale. The Angels will go with Matt Shoemaker on Sunday instead.

Just as well. Peña will still arrive in Arizona for spring training to audition for a permanent role in the rotation, Angels general manager Billy Eppler said.

"We like what we've seen and we're encouraged that he can build upon this season and take it into 2019," Eppler said.

Peña, acquired from the Cubs last October, has shown the Angels enough in his 90 innings as a starter and the total 126 innings he's thrown between stints in Anaheim and triple-A Salt Lake.

Of late, he's been especially dominant. Toss out a six-run performance Sept. 19 against the playoff-bound Athletics, whom the Angels defeated 8-5 at Angel Stadium on Friday night to extend a late-season surge for a .500 record, and Peña's numbers for September are encouraging: In his first three starts this month, he allowed four runs (three earned) over 20 innings. He allowed just three earned runs on five hits over seven innings Monday. Opponents batted just .221 in those four outings.

This time a year ago, Peña was languishing in the Cubs' bullpen with a 5.24 ERA compiled over 25 appearances. He was headed back to his native Dominican Republic, unsure what his career held. He'd once been a starter toiling in the Cubs farm system, which he joined as a 19-year-old in 2009, but he hadn't pitched in a rotation since his 2015 season. He made his major-league debut as a reliever in August 2016 and spent last season shuttling between Chicago's bullpen and the Cubs' triple-A affiliate.

When the Angels acquired him on Oct. 9, 2017, Peña felt rejuvenated.

"I thank the Cubs for giving me a chance to play in the big leagues but I don't think they gave me a chance to show everything I had," Peña said in Spanish. "Thanks to God [the Angels] have given me a chance to show what I can do."

He was invited to Angels spring training in February as a reliever, but by the end of camp had inspired Eppler and his staff to send Peña to work as a starter in Salt Lake. Injuries that forced the Angels to use 16 starting pitchers this season opened a path for Peña to ditch being a long reliever in the big leagues.

Maybe now he will ditch it for the long haul.

"I reminisced with him [this week] about the conversation in Dodger Stadium at the end of spring training where we told him he wasn't making the team and told him we wanted him to go down to triple A to start," Eppler said. "The look on his face was something I'll always remember. It was bright-eyed. He almost asked to repeat what we just said. ... He deserves all the credit for being open minded and embracing it."

Although he wields an arsenal with a mid-90s fastball and secondary pitches that help him control tempo, confidence in his sinker has helped propel Peña. He learned the pitch in the offseason, when he worked with a local pitching coach in his hometown of San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic. He hesitated to adopt the sinker at first. He often fumbled throwing it during spring training. But when he was sent to Salt Lake to start the season, he brought it back.

"It was in some game situations, I would try it and see if I could get a ground ball," Peña said. "I saw that it was working. I thought, well, I think this is gonna be the pitch that's going to make me a better pitcher."

Peña, of course, doesn't have it all figured out. He still posted a 4.18 ERA and allowed opponents to hit .247 in 19 games with the Angels. When he turns 29 in February, he'll have to prove his worth at Angels camp in Tempe, Ariz., all over again.

But he thinks he's earned a chance to be taken seriously as a starter, the role he most commonly played in the minor leagues before the Cubs decided his arsenal was better suited to the bullpen. So too does Eppler.

"I'm going to give my all," he said. "I'm going to prove to them that I deserve a role like that."

Through Shohei Ohtani's sensational but injury-plagued rookie year, his Japanese hometown watched with pride

By Yuri Nagano

Well before Shohei Ohtani joined the Angels, a special exhibit went on display at the Traditional Crafts Museum in his hometown of Oshu: a gold-colored mold of Ohtani's right hand.

The museum, which also exhibits steel kettle ware, mounted the cast last year when he still played for Sapporo's Nippon-Ham Fighters. A light keeps it pleasantly warm to the touch.

"It would be a rare opportunity to actually shake Ohtani's hand, so this is great," said Katsuji Natori, a 61-year-old office worker, after gripping Ohtani's hand mold. "His hand is large," Natori added, with a smile.

Throughout Ohtani's debut season in Major League Baseball, his hometown has obsessively followed his extraordinary early success, the injury that took him off the pitching mound and his gutsy return to the lineup as a hitter.

The Angels will finish the season Sunday about 20 games out of first place in the American League West, and days later Ohtani, 24, is scheduled to undergo surgery to repair his right elbow. But the admiration and affection people of Oshu have for their favorite native son remain undiminished. There's also a sense of local pride that the kind of youth baseball Ohtani played here — with its steadfast emphasis on discipline and sacrifice — helped make him the player he is today.

Ohtani was born and raised in Oshu, a city about 250 miles north of Tokyo, in one of the largest rice-producing districts in the Iwate prefecture. Oshu's population, now about 118,000, has been on a slow decline as younger people move to larger cities with better job prospects. With fewer children available, youth baseball teams in the area have been disappearing, even as Ohtani has brought fame here. Locals get wide-eyed when they hear the name of their hero.

"He is awesome!" said Kosei Takahashi, 11, one Saturday during baseball practice for his Little League team. He wore a green cap and navy-colored uniform emblazoned with orange letters reading "Mizusawa." That's the team Ohtani played for when he was in elementary school.

"He hit a home run in his second game" with the Angels, Kosei said. "I want to be a Major League Baseball player just like him."

Baseball kids aren't the only ones who are starry-eyed about Ohtani.

Kosei's father, Sadafumi Takahashi, 39, is the team's baseball coach. Takahashi did not instruct Ohtani, but he said those who witnessed the baseball wunderkind up close rated him as "exceptional."

Ohtani hit so many home runs in Little League, a 60-foot-high netted fence was erected because so many balls went missing, lost in a river near the field.

All over town, there are reminders of Ohtani's time here, and the pride in his career. Early in the season, Anetai Elementary School, which Ohtani attended, celebrated his move to the major leagues in the U.S. with a large purple and yellow banner. Referring to him with the honorific of "senpai," or "senior," it read, "Good luck! Ohtani Senpai, Our Hope."

Oshu City Hall has a banner too, which says, "Press onward pitching and hitting." A copy of Ohtani's hand cast also is on display at City Hall, but unlike the museum version, it's not warmed up.

"We are so proud of" Ohtani, said Mika Oikawa, a sixth-grader at Anetai.

The townspeople have been cheering for Ohtani even before he turned pro. Natori, the museum visitor, said he's been an Ohtani fan since he played for Hanamaki Higashi High School, north of Oshu.

Video highlights of his play are featured regularly on TV networks across Japan, and he's been a boon to the local agricultural cooperative in the Oshu area. The group has used photos of Ohtani in its ads for the last two years, said Yutaka Onodera, an official with the cooperative, JA Iwate Furusato.

The cooperative's brand of rice "is doing better due to our posters featuring Ohtani," Onodera said.

Ohtani was hailed as the "Japanese Babe Ruth" for his rare ability to excel in both pitching and hitting. When he had to stop pitching after suffering an injury to his right elbow in June, the worry in Oshu was palpable — as was relief when he returned to the lineup as a hitter in July.

"I'm relieved Ohtani is back in the game," Takayoshi Sagawa, Oshu's chief of the community development section, said at the time. He was among many city officials who every month were often seen wearing red Angels T-shirts emblazoned with "Ohtani" on the back. "I just hope he doesn't push himself too much that he injures himself again," he said.

Ohtani became known, in part, because of the Koshien games — two tournaments, one in spring and one in August, that are a must-watch affair for many Japanese. The games are televised live and the winners become front-page news. The intensity and popularity of the tournaments are often compared to the Super Bowl.

The August competition, the All-Japan High School Baseball Championship Tournament, has existed for 100 years. Hanamaki Higashi High's team has qualified for these tournaments 12 times, but the closest it has come to winning was second place.

"Ohtani was very hard-working from the minute he joined Hanamaki Higashi," said Hiroyuki Sasuga, manager of the team. Sasuga discovered Ohtani when he was a seventh-grader and helped arranged Ohtani's recruitment to Hanamaki Higashi. "Ohtani is very teachable, honest and straightforward," he said.

Ten Hanamaki Higashi graduates have moved on to become professional players, and the team's demanding regimen is often credited. Practice lasts at least five hours a day, rain or shine. In winter, practice has been known to go until 9 p.m. — even in the snow.

Hanamaki Higashi, like most of the very competitive high school teams in Japan, has many rules. Team members must live in the dormitory. They cannot use social media or messaging platforms. Girlfriends are prohibited. Students are allowed to access their cellphones from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m., when they may call their families, watch YouTube videos and surf online. There's no soda, no junk food and no instant ramen.

"We only have three years to get a shot at Koshien, and we feel these rules make sense," said the team's student captain, Sota Sugawara, 17.

Ohtani was pitching when Hanamaki Higashi played in the spring Koshien games in 2012. After the team was eliminated in the first round, Ohtani blamed himself, writing this note on the back of a large white calendar:

"The chance that we seized in the Koshien was all but lost because of me. But that doesn't matter now. We will become the best team in Japan by getting closer to our goal step by step, by keeping on playing."

He never did reach that goal. But in the final week of the Angels' disappointing season, he's been impressive at bat. On Monday he hit a home run that, according to laser measurements, left his bat at 112.9 mph — his hardest-hit homer of the year. The next night he hit a game-tying single, and another home run the day after that.

Those hits are reflective of a sign in Hanamaki Higashi's training room: "A champion is a person who may fall but picks himself up."

FROM ANGELS.COM

Trout tallies 39th HR, two shy of career high

Ohtani plates pair on three hits as Angels win fourth straight

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Shortly before first pitch, Mike Trout took the field for a pregame ceremony in which he was officially recognized as the Angels' team MVP, an honor bestowed upon him by his teammates. He later backed up that credential, blasting a two-run home run as part of the Angels' 8-5 win over the A's in Friday night's series opener at Angel Stadium.

Trout crushed a first-pitch fastball from Oakland right-hander Mike Fiers out to right-center field to collect his 39th home run of the season and stake the Angels a 5-0 lead in the third inning. The 27-year-old center fielder is now only two shy of matching the career high of 41 that he set in 2015 with two games left to go this season.

"Mike, he's just the head of the class," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's a tremendous leader, and it's a very justified award for him to get. He deserves it. He's earned it. It just shows the respect players have for him."

Trout's blast proved to be just one of several highlights for the Angels as they entered the final weekend of the 2018 season. Taylor Ward added his second home run in as many games, and Shohei Ohtani continued his push for the American League Rookie of the Year Award, chipping in with three hits, two RBIs and a stolen base to help extend the Angels' (79-81) winning streak to four games.

"For my mind, he's hands down Rookie of the Year," Scioscia said. "I don't know if anyone's come into this league in a long time and done as much as he's done. Even though his pitching season was cut short, when he was out there, he was dominant. I think at the plate, you see the talent. He's having a terrific season."

Jaime Barria did not allow a hit over 4 2/3 innings in the final start of his rookie campaign, but he was pulled after issuing a career-high six walks and throwing 81 pitches. After making his MLB debut on April 11, the 22-year-old right-hander compiled a team-high 10 wins and logged a 3.41 ERA over 129 1/3 innings for the Angels.

Of the nine starters who were originally listed on the club's rotation depth chart at the beginning of the year, Barria was the only one to avoid landing on the disabled list.

"It was a great year," Barria said in Spanish. "It was a learning year. I'm really happy because of that."

Fiers, who replaced "opener" Lou Trivino in the second inning, did not look sharp out of the bullpen for the A's, yielding a leadoff single to Ohtani and hitting Justin Upton to put runners on first and second with no outs. Ohtani and Upton then executed a double steal to set up Francisco Arcia's RBI groundout to the right side of the infield.

Ward followed by launching a first-pitch slider from Fiers out to left field for his fifth home run of the season, extending the Angels' lead to 3-0. They added another pair of runs on Trout's homer in the third.

Barria navigated through the first four innings without incident, but he began experiencing control issues toward the end of his outing. He walked Ramon Laureano to begin the fifth, though he erased him from the basepaths with a strike-'em-out, throw-'em-out double play. Barria still couldn't escape the inning, as he issued back-to-back walks to Jonathan Lucroy and Nick Martini before being replaced by Taylor Cole.

Cole struck out Matt Chapman to escape the jam, though he gave up a leadoff single to Jed Lowrie in the sixth to end the Angels' bid for a combined no-hitter. Cole went on to strike out five over 2 1/3 scoreless innings, lowering his ERA to 2.75 over 36 innings this season.

Ohtani delivered a sacrifice fly in the fifth and an RBI infield single in the seventh to help push the Angels' lead to 8-0, but the A's -- aided by a pair of errors from Jabari Blash and Ward -- came back to score five runs in the eighth to narrow the deficit to three.

Hansel Robles was summoned to pitch the ninth and held off the A's by striking out the side to seal the Angels' win. He whiffed Matt Chapman on a 100.2-mph fastball, his hardest-thrown pitch since joining the Angels in June.

Robles, who recently changed his warm-up music to the Undertaker's theme song, credited the uptick in velocity to the rush of adrenaline that comes from pitching the ninth.

"All my life, I've wanted to be a closer," Robles said in Spanish.

SOUND SMART

Ohtani is the third Angels rookie with 20 home runs and 10 stolen bases, joining Devon White (1987) and Trout (2012).

HE SAID IT

"In his first crack at the Major Leagues, Jaime did terrific. Tonight was just uncharacteristic. He totally lost his release point. That's not the way Jaime can pitch." -- *Scioscia, on Barria*

UP NEXT

Left-hander Tyler Skaggs (8-9, 3.91 ERA) will make his final start of the season on Saturday as the Angels continue their three-game series against the A's at 6:07 p.m. PT at Angel Stadium. Right-hander Trevor

Cahill (6-4, 3.91 ERA) will start for Oakland. Skaggs gave up four runs over 2 1/3 innings in his last start on Sunday against the Astros. He is 2-1 with a 3.20 ERA in four starts against the A's this year.

Pena hopes to be rotation candidate for 2019

Righty 'had a great run' as Angels starter, Scioscia says

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- Felix Pena's 2018 campaign is officially in the books.

Pena had been lined up to start Sunday's season finale against the A's, but the Angels decided to shut down the 28-year-old right-hander because of workload concerns. Because of the off-day on Thursday, the Angels will be able to bring back Matt Shoemaker on normal rest to pitch in Pena's place. Left-hander Tyler Skaggs will start on Saturday.

Acquired from the Cubs in exchange for cash considerations last October, Pena was initially viewed as a potential multi-inning reliever before the Angels decided to try him out as a starter following a series of injuries to their rotation. He made his first MLB start on June 19 and gradually settled into his new role, posting a 4.18 ERA over a career-high 92 2/3 innings for the Angels this season.

"There's no doubt he's taken some steps forward," manager Mike Scioscia said Friday. "He's had a lot on his plate, and he's proved that he's moved forward with that. He had a great run for us. He learned a lot. There were some growing pains, but it proved that he's a [starting-rotation] candidate, for sure."

Pena yielded three runs over seven innings against the Rangers in his final start of the season on Monday. Despite not having started regularly since he was in Double-A in 2015, Pena pitched at least six innings in seven of his last eight starts and recorded a 3.49 ERA with 11 walks and 45 strikeouts over that span.

Pena said he hopes that run of success showed that he can be a viable starting rotation option for the Angels moving forward.

"I enjoy it a lot more than being in the bullpen," Pena said in Spanish. "I'm not thinking about returning to the bullpen anymore. Hopefully, that'll be the case. I'm going to keep working hard to always give my best."

FROM KYODO NEWS**Baseball: Ohtani goes 3-for-3 with 2 RBIs as Angels beat Oakland 8-5**

Shohei Ohtani went 3-for-3 with two RBIs and a run scored on Friday as the Los Angeles Angels rallied early and held on for an 8-5 win against the Oakland Athletics.

Ohtani singled off Oakland right-hander Mike Fiers (12-8) to lead off the second inning of the series opener at Angel Stadium and extend his hit streak to four games.

The Japanese rookie advanced to second when Justin Upton was hit by a pitch before reaching third with his 10th stolen base of the season. He crossed the plate on a groundout to put the Angels on the board.

Taylor Ward followed up with a two-run homer, and Mike Trout blasted a two-run shot in the third. Ohtani then doubled to notch his second-straight multi-hit game.

Ohtani's sacrifice fly in the fifth and RBI single in the seventh added the Angels' sixth and seventh runs. Andrelton Simmons drew a bases-loaded walk in the seventh to cap the scoring for Los Angeles.

"I was able to reach base as a leadoff hitter and bring home runners on base ahead of me," Ohtani said. "Even on my fly out, I put a good swing on a first-pitch strike. I want to maintain this quality in my at-bats tomorrow."

"Also, when I run the bases, I am able to create scoring opportunities."

In his first career start against the Athletics, Jaime Barria fanned four and did not allow a hit, but was replaced by Taylor Cole in the fifth after walking five of his last six batters. Cole (4-2) struck out five of the eight batters he faced and picked up the win.

In the eighth, Williams Jerez and Japanese right-hander Junichi Tazawa allowed a combined five runs, but Hansel Robles struck out three in the ninth to secure the Angels' fourth straight victory.

According to the club, Ohtani is the third Angel to hit 20 homers and steal 10 bases in his rookie season, after Devon White in 1987 and Trout in 2012.

He is also the first Japanese major leaguer to hit 15 homers and steal 10 bases in the same season since Seattle Mariners' veteran Ichiro Suzuki in 2005, and Tadahito Iguchi in 2005 and 2006 with the Chicago White Sox.

On Wednesday against the Texas Rangers, Ohtani hit a tying RBI single and a game-winning solo shot, his 22nd home run of the season, matching his career high from 2016. It came off former Nippon Ham Fighters teammate Chris Martin.

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES**The Greatest 10-9 Season Ever**

Jacob deGrom was often left on his own by the Mets. Now he stands alone as the clear pick to win the N.L. Cy Young Award. Who else should join baseball's honor roll?

By Tyler Kepner

For voting members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America, the end of the regular season brings a fun but serious ritual: selecting the winners of the annual awards. Other organizations honor players and managers, too, but the writers' awards have the longest tradition and retain the strongest resonance throughout the game.

Everyone has an opinion — even those of us whose company policy, alas, prevents us from casting a ballot. Here's who I think should win the eight B.B.W.A.A. awards when the voting is revealed in November.

Rookie of the Year**AMERICAN LEAGUE**

Shohei Ohtani, Los Angeles Angels

It seems odd at first to honor Ohtani for a season tinged with disappointment. The notion of one player using such a wide array of skills — for now, anyway — proved too good to be true. Ohtani started only 10 games as a pitcher, and will begin this off-season with Tommy John surgery. He will not pitch in 2019.

Even so, Ohtani's body of work places him at the top of his rookie class. He went 4-2 with a 3.31 E.R.A. in those 10 starts, averaging 11 strikeouts per nine innings. He did not play another defensive position, but in more than 100 games as a hitter, Ohtani more than held his own: 22 home runs, a .283 average and a .930 O.P.S. entering the final weekend.

Before Ohtani, only Babe Ruth (in 1919) had hit 20 homers in a season while also pitching at least 50 innings. Those thresholds might seem a bit low, compared with the Angels' dreams. But when you have to stretch back 99 years to find a precedent, the numbers stand taller.

With no experience in Major League Baseball and no modern blueprint for his two-way role, Ohtani instantly became an elite performer. That effort deserves a salute.

Runners-up: Miguel Andujar, Yankees; Joey Wendle, Rays.

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

FROM THE NEW YORK POST**The best and worst honorees from an atypical baseball season**

By Joel Sherman

What if I told you the Marlins traded an outfielder in the offseason who might win an MVP in 2018 — and it wasn't Giancarlo Stanton?

What if I told you that a Tampa Bay team that did more to devalue starting pitching than any in history, just might have a starter who will capture the AL Cy Young?

What if I told you that once it became relatively evident Shohei Ohtani was going to need Tommy John surgery, he really began to do the work that could make him the AL Rookie of the Year?

What if I told you the Rockies would spend \$106 million last offseason on relievers and continue to play in the offensive haven of Coors Field and win because of starting pitching?

It was that kind of strange season, one in which for the first time you were more likely to see a strikeout than a hit — going into Saturday it was 40,503 hits to 40,601 strikeouts. As recently as 2016, there were still 3,294 more hits than whiffs and the differential was 11,088 just a decade ago.

Those numbers chill a baseball leadership concerned about retaining and attaining fans when nearly 35 percent of all outcomes end in a strikeout, walk, home run or hit by pitch. The internal debates about how to foster balls in play and evoke more consistent action obsess the Commissioner's Office. That is for the big picture. In a smaller window we are left to figure out awards in a sport in which standards are shifting — not just more strikeouts than ever, but less concerns than ever about pitcher wins, RBIs, batting average and even who starts or finishes a game:

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AL Rookie of the Year**Shohei Ohtani, Angels**

Did Miguel Andujar and Gleyber Torres have wonderful rookie years? You bet? Tampa Bay's Joey Wendle, too. But I have seen their rookie years in some form or fashion previously. Ohtani was Ruthian. No, literally Ruthian. No one had pitched and hit like this since Babe Ruth in 1919.

In 10 starts, Ohtani had an ERA 26 percent better than MLB average and in 359 plate appearances he had an OPS 56 percent better than league average. A ligament issue cost him a month in total play and ultimately led to needing Tommy John surgery. But he became a more regular hitter on July 3 (starting just once after that) and in that period, his .960 OPS was fifth in the AL (minimum 225 plate appearances) behind Trout, Betts, Martinez and Bregman and in front of Chapman. You know, the guys competing for MVP.

2. Andujar. 3. Torres. 4. Wendle. 5. Brad Keller, Royals.

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS**Does Mike Trout suffer from MVP fatigue like LeBron James and Michael Jordan?**

By Mike Oz

Mike Trout probably isn't going to win his third MVP award. Mookie Betts is the frontrunner and seemingly a lock to get the award in November. Yet, just like every season of his big-league career, there's a compelling case to be made for Trout as the Most Valuable Player.

Trout has more homers, a better on-base percentage and a higher OPS, while Betts has a higher batting average, more runs scored and a couple more RBIs. Both would be a solid and worthwhile choice. However, that's not how MVP awards work. There has to be *one* winner.

And wouldn't you know it? On a recent rundown of MVP candidates by MLB Network, Trout wasn't even on the list. No disrespect to Alex Bregman, Khris Davis, J.D. Martinez or Jose Ramirez — but Trout deserves to be on this list too. Even his mom thinks so.

And while we're almost certain it was an honest mistake on MLB Network's part, we still couldn't help but wonder on this week's Yahoo Sports MLB Podcast whether Trout is suffering from some MVP fatigue — the same type of MVP fatigue that clings to greats like LeBron James and Michael Jordan.

When you're the best year-in and year-out — which make no mistake, Trout is without a doubt, the best player in the game — you might get taken for granted. When you're as consistently great as Mike Trout, sometimes that greatness gets overlooked.

But why? It's something Jeff Passan, Tim Brown and I discussed on this week's podcast, the full episode of which you can find on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Acast and other podcast platforms. We honed in on a couple of factors:

- Playing for the Angels makes it easier to overlook Trout than if he played for, say, the Red Sox. Some voters think that playing for a good team is part of what makes an MVP.
- Never having performed on the biggest stage, in the postseason, is something that some fans will hold against Trout, because we're such a ring-driven sports culture. Even though the MVP award has literally nothing to do with postseason performance and ballots are due before the postseason starts. Some people will say Trout isn't as good as the numbers say because his teams have never won a postseason game. That's one difference between Trout and LeBron or MJ. They have done it on the biggest stages.

FROM CBS SPORTS**Los Angeles Angels head into offseason looking for a fresh start in 2019**

Angels are heading into the offseason with a lot of unanswered questions.

By Katherine Acquavella

For the last seven years, the Los Angeles Angels have struggled to build a winning team around the greatest player in franchise history, Mike Trout. The seven-time All-Star has yet to win a playoff game with the team that drafted him as the 25th pick of the 2009 MLB Draft.

That same year Trout was drafted was the last time the Angels won a playoff game; they defeated the Boston Red Sox in the ALDS (3-0) before falling to eventual champions New York Yankees in the ALCS (4-2). L.A. has made the playoffs on just one occasion since then, back in 2014 where they were swept by the Kansas City Royals in the ALDS.

Los Angeles sits at 79-81 heading into Saturday, two games below .500 with two games left against the Athletics in Oakland. Heading into the offseason after another disappointing season, this team has a lot of concerns piling up. Let's break down the biggest ones:

Shohei Ohtani

It was announced earlier this week that Angels two-way star Shohei Ohtani will undergo Tommy John surgery during the first week of the offseason. The procedure will keep Ohtani off the mound for the entire 2019 season, which obviously leads to two big questions for Los Angeles.

What will the starting rotation look like in 2019 without Ohtani?

Lately, the Angels have really had it rough when it comes to their major-league pitching staff. In the last four years, six (Ohtani will be number seven) Angels pitchers have undergone Tommy John surgery.

Los Angeles had some promising appearances from their pitchers throughout the 2018 season that could help when it comes to filling Ohtani's spot, or reconstructing the entire rotation. Matt Shoemaker spent five months on the disabled list recovering from forearm surgery and returned to throw five innings against the Texas Rangers on Sept. 25, striking out seven while only giving up one run. Before he was shut down for the season due to shoulder inflammation, Nick Tropeano was 7-7 with a 4.74 ERA and 64 strike outs in 76 innings.

There was also Andrew Heaney, who threw six scoreless innings against the Houston Astros and Rangers in a season where he saw career-highs in IP (180) and strikeouts (180 Ks). Rookie Jaime Barria made his debut this season in April, and he reached double digits in wins (10-9) finishing with a 3.24 ERA and a 1.27 WHIP. 2017 second-round draft pick Griffin Canning could also find himself competing for a roster spot during spring training after shooting his way up to the Angels' Triple-A affiliate this season.

The Angels could also go after free-agent pitchers at the top of the market, such as Dallas Keuchel, Patrick Corbin, Charlie Morton and J.A. Happ.

Will Ohtani be allowed to hit next season?

It's still unclear whether or not Ohtani will hit in 2019. But if he does, he would become the first player in MLB history to continue playing in the year after surgery, according to Yahoo Sports' Jeff Passan. It would also be a huge boost to the Angels' offense next season.

Ohtani is hitting .283 with 22 home runs, 57 runs and 59 RBI in his rookie season. His .930 OPS would rank seventh in the majors if he qualified (Trout is first with a 1.090 OPS). Ohtani is also the first player in Major League Baseball history with 10 home runs, 10 stolen bases and 10 games pitched in a single season.

The Tommy John surgery rehab timetable is generally much shorter for hitters (6-9 months) than pitchers, though the Angels have yet to confirm that Ohtani will be hitting next season. They have indicated they will develop a rehab plan with the doctors in the coming weeks and months. You would think that the Angels would agree to letting Ohtani hit in 2019 as long as they get the OK from Ohtani's doctors.

Mike Scioscia

While Angels manager Mike Scioscia has said that he wants to continue managing, it seems like a change is more likely, possibly coming as early as this weekend. After nearly two decades with the Angels, Scioscia earned one pennant and one World Series championship, but Los Angeles has made the playoffs just once in the last nine years despite annually high-priced rosters.

What has hurt the Angels the most under Scioscia's reign has been his dismissive attitude towards analytics. When former general manager Jerry Dipoto tried to push the Angels in a more stat-heavy direction, Scioscia was painted as a manager resistant and misinformed to the advantages of advanced analytics. In 2015, Dipoto resigned as the Angels GM after just three and a half years and now holds the same job with division rival Seattle Mariners.

If Scioscia's out at the end of this season, current GM Billy Eppler, who is heading into his fourth season with the Angels, will need to find a new skipper who is going to be on board with baseball in the 21st century.

Mike Trout

Over Mike Trout's eight years in the majors, he has produced a .307/.416/.573 batting line, hitting 239 home runs and 189 steals. He has made the All-Star Game in each of his seven full seasons, winning the 2012 American League Rookie of the Year and five Silver Slugger awards. A two-time AL MVP, Trout has never finished below fourth in the vote.

Trout already signed a six-year, \$144 million extension prior to the 2014 season, keeping him in Los Angeles through 2020. However, with his free agency getting closer, the Angels are looking to come to terms on another extension, as they are reportedly looking to offer Trout a lifetime contract.

The question of whether Trout will agree to remain a part of the organization that drafted him is going to have Angels fans, as well as the rest of the baseball world, on edge this upcoming offseason.

Albert Pujols

The obvious concern with Albert Pujols is two-fold: the 38-year-old's body isn't as strong as it used to be, and he remains under contract for another three seasons.

Pujols ended his 2018 season early following knee surgery, and he also had surgery to remove bone spurs from his elbow. The ten-time All-Star will begin his offseason by rehabbing.

For the past five seasons, it has been as if Pujols has never not been battling through injuries. Back when the 2013 season began, he was recovering from knee surgery he had during his first offseason as an Angel, and his plantar fasciitis made it difficult for him to run hard to first base. In 2015, he aggravated an inured plantar plate on his right big toe and had offseason surgery.

The legendary slugger's offense has been on a steady downward trend for about ten years, and he's no longer an average hitter. He has just a .243 average and a .684 OPS since 2017. Pujols finished 2018 hitting .245/.289/.411. and while last year's shortened season marks represent an improvement from 2017, they are also the second-worst offensive numbers of his career.

Pujols logged 70 games at first base and 47 as the Angels' designated hitter in 2018. He hit .233 with 30 RBI while at first and hit .263 with 34 RBI while DH.

2019 is going to be the year where the Angels have to take a long and hard look at where Pujols fits in their lineup, and if they can fit him somewhere, will he actually be able to help the team win?