



Press Clips

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FROM THE OC REGISTER**Ian Kinsler's home run caps comeback victory for Angels**

By J.P. Hoornstra

MINNEAPOLIS — The Angels were in a spot Friday. It's a spot they hope doesn't become familiar.

They had four hits and only run through six innings against the Minnesota Twins. Mike Trout, their best hitter, was 0 for 3 with two strikeouts. Andrelton Simmons and Shohei Ohtani, two pillars of their lineup, were on the disabled list with no defined end in sight. More urgently, the Angels were down a run against the Minnesota Twins with nine outs to waste.

It was a moment that demanded a response, and Ian Kinsler responded. His two-run home run in the seventh inning against Ryan Pressly gave the Angels the go-ahead runs in a 4-2 win over the Twins.

The home run, Kinsler's seventh, was long and loud enough to quiet the announced crowd of 28,383 at Target Field before it landed. The ball traveled an estimated 411 feet, clanging off the I of the first deck of seats overhanging the left-field bleachers.

A few more moments like that can quiet doubts about the Angels' ability to compete without Ohtani and Simmons.

"Close ballgames build character," Kinsler said. "Anytime you can win those games, it's big."

The veteran second baseman rejected the idea that these are the kind of games — close and low scoring — that the Angels will have to win without Ohtani and Simmons. Time will tell. Simmons was using crutches to avoid putting pressure on his sprained ankle the last time he was with the team. Ohtani will miss the next three weeks, and maybe the rest of the season, after receiving a PRP and stem cell injection to treat a sprained elbow ligament.

The Angels got enough clutch performances without them Friday.

Garrett Richards pitched five strong innings, and part of a rocky sixth, before the Angels' bullpen allowed only an infield single over the final 3-2/3 innings. Justin Upton's 15th home run of the season gave the Angels an insurance run in the eighth inning.

"You can't replace those guys," Kinsler said of Ohtani and Simmons, "but at the same time, the games don't stop. We've got to play the games. We've got to pitch well, we've got to swing the bats — continue to swing the bats."

The come-from-behind win allowed the Angels (36-28) to keep pace with the first-place Seattle Mariners (40-23) and remain 4-1/2 games out of first place in the American League West.

Richards has a 2.09 ERA in his last seven starts but only one win to show for it. The right-hander settled for another no-decision Friday despite allowing only two earned runs, walking three, and striking out seven in 5-1/3 innings.

“We have faith in everybody,” Richards said. “(The bullpen) picked me up. The offense picked me up. Hopefully, this is some good momentum moving forward.”

Richards could scarcely be blamed for the Twins’ first run.

The Angels led 1-0 when Max Kepler singled with one out in the second inning. The next batter, Miguel Sano, hit a fairly routine grounder to Angels third baseman Luis Valbuena. With a chance to turn a double play, Valbuena pulled his body toward second base as the baseball hopped over his glove and into left field.

Kepler scored all the way from first base, and Sano was credit with a double.

The score remained 1-1 until the sixth inning, when Robbie Grossman smoldered a hanging slider into left field for a home run. The Twins led 2-1, and Richards’ night was over after he walked the next batter, Kepler.

“I made some good pitches, made a mistake to Grossman that unfortunately put us down a run,” Richards said. “I’m just glad we got the win.”

Twins starter Lance Lynn limited the Angels to one run over six innings Friday. The right-hander walked two batters and struck out seven, lowering his ERA from 5.46 to 5.08.

The Angels’ lone rally against Lynn came in the second inning, and they very nearly scored more than one. Zack Cozart, Jose Fernandez, and Martin Maldonado – the Angels’ 6-7-8 hitters – hit singles in consecutive at-bats. Fernandez’s single came in his first major-league at-bat, and it sent Cozart to third base. Cozart scored easily on Maldonado’s grounder back up the middle, giving the Angels a 1-0 lead.

Chris Young made the second out on an infield pop-up. The next batter, Ian Kinsler, broke his bat on a weak flare toward second base that landed on the infield grass. Nobody could field the ball cleanly, Kinsler was safe with an infield single, and the bases were loaded for Trout.

Trout began the game with only one hit, a single, in six career at-bats against Lynn. In the first inning, Lynn challenged Trout with a two-strike fastball and got him to swing and miss. This time Trout fared no better. He fouled off a 96-mph heater with the count full, then swung and missed at another.

Trout is hitless in his last nine at-bats with five strikeouts. He saw 17 pitches against Lynn on Friday. Only the last two were curveballs. He finished the game 0 for 4 with two flyouts.

The Angels were trailing 2-1 in the seventh inning when Martin Maldonado doubled against Pressly, just ahead of Kinsler’s home run. Five of his seven home runs this season have come in the last two weeks, and three of his five hits during the Angels’ last homestand left the ballpark.

Noe Ramirez (2-2), Jose Alvarez and Blake Parker allowed only an infield single and struck out five batters. Parker was credited with his sixth save.

Shohei Ohtani's elbow injury will force Angels to scramble at two positions

By J.P. Hoonstra

MINNEAPOLIS — For some, losing three of your teammates to elbow injuries in one season might make each dose of bad news easier to swallow than the last.

Not Martin Maldonado. The veteran catcher didn't sugarcoat his reaction to the news that Shohei Ohtani would miss at least the next three weeks after being diagnosed with a Grade 2 sprain of the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow.

"It's sad, you know," he said. "It was like that with JC (Ramirez), Keynan (Middleton), all those guys. Those guys are part of our team. Being a catcher, I think I'm more close to them than anybody else. When you hear the news for any pitcher ... it's devastating."

Ohtani's diagnosis is not a death sentence. It isn't even a guaranteed date with Tommy John surgery. Manager Mike Scioscia's response was more optimistic than Maldonado's, noting that alternative treatments for Grade 2 sprains could allow Ohtani to beat the typical Tommy John timetable of 12 to 18 months.

"Hopefully," Scioscia said, "it's something that can be managed."

Of course, hope cannot fill in as a pitcher or a designated hitter. The Angels must replace Ohtani at both positions after living off his Ruthian excellence for two months.

With no less than six days' rest between his first nine starts, Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 earned-run average. As a DH, he is batting .289 with a .372 on-base percentage and .535 slugging percentage. He has six home runs and 20 RBIs in 34 games.

The Angels will move back to a traditional five-man starting rotation for "some stretches," Scioscia said. Rookie right-hander Jaime Barría, who is 5-1 with a 2.48 ERA, will be back from Triple-A soon.

The Angels' rotation has thrived within a flexible six-man format. Keeping it intact could be a challenge without Ohtani. Beyond Barría, the Angels' 40-man roster is not rife with internal options.

Jesus Castillo, a 22-year-old right-hander, is 4-4 with a 5.06 ERA at Double-A Mobile. Miguel Almonte is on the disabled list at Triple-A Salt Lake and has not pitched this season. Right-hander Parker Bridwell has an 8.68 ERA in six starts at Triple-A.

Lefty John Lamb, who has a 3.72 ERA in 12 starts at Triple-A Salt Lake, is the only other pitcher in the organization with a major league start to his credit.

“We’re going to look, just like we did with Shohei in there, week-to-week and see how things are going,” Scioscia said. “We’ll continue to do that.”

Albert Pujols was the Angels’ designated hitter on Friday against the Minnesota Twins. Jose Fernandez was added to the roster and made his major league debut at first base against right-hander Lance Lynn. Luis Valbuena and Jefry Marte have also seen time at first base this season.

“We’ve got a number of guys who can play first base,” Scioscia said. “The DH will be rotated around and we’ll hopefully get our lineup doing what we hope to on the offensive side.”

An off-season physical reportedly revealed Ohtani had a Grade 1 sprain in his right UCL long before he made his Angels debut. Yet both Scioscia and Maldonado never saw evidence of an elbow injury – either in Ohtani’s performance or his words – before he mentioned feeling stiff after Wednesday’s game against the Kansas City Royals.

To Maldonado, the news was just as surprising as it was devastating.

“We’re going to be here to support him,” Maldonado said of Ohtani. “We are a family. We are a team. We’re hoping for the best. It’s tough for a pitcher, for a position player for anybody. We want him to be the best, be healthy for us.”

MORE INJURIES

Ohtani and infielder Kaleb Cowart were both placed on the 10-day disabled list Friday.

Scioscia said Cowart sprained his ankle stepping off the team bus Thursday in Minnesota. The manager called it a “freak injury” – not unlike shortstop Andrelton Simmons spraining his ankle Tuesday when he tripped down the dugout steps.

“You know you’re under a rain cloud when guys are getting hurt and it’s not baseball activities,” Scioscia said.

Losing Cowart, a switch-hitter, and Ohtani, a left-handed hitter, left the Angels’ lineup even more right-handed than usual. Left-handed hitting outfielder Kole Calhoun is already on the disabled list with a strained oblique.

A pair of left-handed hitters got the call from Salt Lake: Fernandez and infielder Nolan Fontana.

Calhoun has resumed baseball activities in Arizona, Scioscia said, but he and Simmons have no timetable for returning to the Angels.

‘AN HONOR BEING HERE’

For Fernandez, 30, the call-up culminated a long journey that began in Cuba and included 146 minor league games with the Dodgers and Angels before his debut Friday.

How does he feel?

“Very motivated,” Fernandez said in Spanish.

“This is my first day in the major leagues,” he continued. “It is an honor being here. What I will try to do in my work, I will do it well and try to help the team whenever necessary.”

Fernandez said he spoke to his family in Cuba immediately after getting the news yesterday. After defecting from the island nation in December 2015, he signed a \$200,000 contract with the Dodgers but he did not advance beyond the Triple-A level. He was released in Nov. 2017 and signed with the Angels.

This season, Fernandez hit .345 with 10 home runs and 39 RBIs in 53 games for Salt Lake.

The Angels began the day with 39 players on their 40-man roster, so they did not have to make a corresponding move to add Fernandez. His contract allows him to be optioned back to the minor leagues.

Angels place Shohei Ohtani on the DL with a grade 2 UCL sprain in elbow

By Jeff Fletcher

Angels two-way phenom Shohei Ohtani was placed on the disabled list on Friday with what the team called a grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament.

The club announced that Ohtani underwent platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections on Thursday. He will be re-evaluated in three weeks, and most likely will miss a significant portion of the rest of the season, at least.

It is the second time this week that one of the Angels' key players suffered a significant injury, after Andrelton Simmons sprained his ankle slipping on the dugout steps on Tuesday.

Any talk of a damaged UCL leads to speculation about potential Tommy John surgery, but General Manager Billy Eppler said the Angels are “hopeful” that can be avoided, with the injections providing enough healing.

Ohtani left his start on Wednesday with what the club described as a recurrence of the blister issue that had bothered him in April and periodically during his time in Japan. The Angels did not make Ohtani available to speak to the media after Wednesday's game.

“When he came out of the game with the blister the other night, he was up getting that blister drained,” Eppler said. “As the game adrenaline wore off, he said ‘My elbow is getting a little stiff.’ Based on that, we decided to get an image.”

Ohtani then remained in Southern California, while the rest of the team flew to Minneapolis on Wednesday night, and he had further tests on Thursday.

Eppler said the Angels had no knowledge of any elbow trouble prior to Wednesday night. By all accounts and the quality of his performance, Ohtani had recovered well from last year's reported grade 1 sprain of his UCL, news that broke when details of his physical were leaked during the winter meetings.

A grade 1 sprain means the ligament is merely stretched, but not otherwise damaged. A grade 3 sprain is when the ligament is torn, always requiring surgery. There are a variety of degrees in between that are classified as grade 2 sprains, sometimes not requiring surgery. Eppler said he could not give any further information as to where on the grade 2 spectrum Ohtani's injury stands.

Ohtani, 23, was enjoying a historic season, succeeding as both a pitcher and a hitter, in his rookie year in the majors. He is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA in nine games, and he is hitting .289 with six homers in 114 at-bats.

He threw 110 pitches on May 20 against the Tampa Bay Rays, allowing just two runs in 7-2/3 innings. His next start was expected to be a week later, at Yankee Stadium, but the Angels pushed him back a few days, citing "workload management." He returned to pitch on May 30 in Detroit. Although he started off with his velocity down, he said it was because he hadn't warmed up enough. He still got up to 101 mph by the end of his outing, which was shortened by rain.

Ohtani's injury obviously prevents him from pitching, but Eppler conceded that he might have been able to continue hitting. However, the Angels value his pitching too much to take that chance, Eppler said.

"If he was only a designated hitter and that's all he was in life, probably (he could have continued playing with the injury), but that's not his circumstance and that's not how we want to utilize the player and realize the impact of the player," Eppler said. "It was determined that any unique swing or variability could impose some small percentage in risk, so that's why we're going to give it the three-week time period to reassess and then make a determination at that time."

In the short term, the loss of Ohtani might have more impact on the Angels' offense than their rotation.

The starting rotation has flourished this season, with Ohtani part of a six-man rotation. Asked if the Angels will now revert to a traditional five-man rotation, Eppler said they will "take it day by day." Jaime Barria, who had been bouncing between Triple-A and the majors as the sixth starter, could simply stay in the majors now, with Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, Andrew Heaney and Nick Tropeano filling out a traditional rotation.

As for the lineup, Albert Pujols is free to return to being the Angels' full-time designated hitter, with Luis Valbuena or Jefry Marte getting the bulk of the time at first base. Third base is now muddled because Zack Cozart moved over to shortstop to take Simmons' place, and on Friday the Angels also announced that Kaleb Cowart has a sprained left ankle. Marte and Valbuena can play third, and they recalled Jose Miguel Fernandez and Nolan Fontana, who both play multiple infield positions.

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**After a failed defection attempt from Cuba and ban, Jose Fernandez makes his MLB debut in Angels' 4-2 win over Twins**

By Jeff Miller

The journey here from triple-A Salt Lake, as notable as it was, paled to the path Jose Fernandez really completed Friday.

A Cuban who was banned and missed significant time after a failed defection attempt in 2014, Fernandez finally made his big-league debut, at age 30, singling in his first at-bat in the Angels' 4-2 victory over the Minnesota Twins.

"I never lost hope," he said through an interpreter. "If I did, I wouldn't be here today."

Fernandez's story was made all the warmer when Ian Kinsler homered — his fifth in 10 games — in the seventh inning, lifting the Angels from a run down to a run up as they won their fifth straight.

With Shohei Ohtani going on the disabled list, the Angels promoted the left-hand-hitting Fernandez and started him at first base with Albert Pujols shifting to designated hitter.

His second-inning single was part of the rally that produced the Angels' first run. Starter Garrett Richards and relievers Noe Ramirez, Jose Alvarez and Blake Parker limited the Twins, giving Kinsler the opportunity to produce.

He drove a 1-2 curveball from Ryan Pressly an estimated 411 feet to left for his two-run homer.

"Any time you can contribute offensively in close games like this," Kinsler said, "it feels good."

An inning later, Justin Upton also homered, his fourth in five games.

Fernandez started last season in the Dodgers organization and played primarily at double-A Tulsa. He was injured in July and eventually released.

"It's not just being 30 years old, it's his path to the big leagues," manager Mike Scioscia said.

"It's definitely a story of perseverance. It's a story of opportunity."

Watch your step

The recent bizarre, miserable luck of the Angels is such that Kaleb Cowart wasn't their first player this week to injure himself walking.

He was, however, the first to do so walking off a bus.

The utility infielder sprained his ankle Thursday morning after the Angels arrived from Southern California. He was placed on the 10-day disabled list Friday.

“He just missed a step and twisted his ankle,” Scioscia said. “Freak injury.”

On Tuesday at Angel Stadium, shortstop Andrelton Simmons turned his ankle walking down the dugout steps and ended up on the disabled list.

Nolan Fontana was promoted from Salt Lake to take Cowart’s roster spot.

Short hop

Right fielder Kole Calhoun (right oblique strain) has resumed some baseball activities. ... Parker, who earned his sixth save, had allowed two earned runs over his last 17 appearances (172/3 innings).

Angels’ Shohei Ohtani likely to miss significant time because of elbow injury

By Jeff Miller

It was during a rather minor postgame procedure Wednesday that something major suddenly shook the Angels’ season.

While having a finger blister worked on, Shohei Ohtani mentioned to the team’s medical personnel that his right elbow was stiffening.

Tests revealed a grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament, an injury that likely will cost Ohtani a significant portion of what remains of this season and perhaps all of what remains.

And it might be worse than that.

The team announced the rookie received a platelet-rich plasma and stem cell injection Thursday with hopes of avoiding ligament replacement surgery that could prevent Ohtani from pitching well into the 2019 season, as well.

“Any time you hear that news on any pitcher,” catcher Martin Maldonado said, “I think it’s devastating.”

Ohtani, 23, will be reevaluated in three weeks, at which point the Angels will have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the more conservative treatment.

General manager Billy Eppler said he is “hopeful” Ohtani can recover without surgery, the Angels already having lost pitchers JC Ramirez, Keynan Middleton and Blake Wood to elbow operations this season.

In December, just after Ohtani became an Angel, medical records leaked to Yahoo Sports indicated that he had a first-degree sprain of the UCL. He reportedly was treated with a platelet-rich plasma injection in October 2017.

The grade 2 diagnosis this week means the injury worsened as Ohtani was putting together an All-Star caliber start to his big-league career.

“We’re losing two significant parts of our club,” manager Mike Scioscia said. “What he did on the mound to this point is really special...What he’s done in the batter’s box as a left-handed bat is very important to us.”

Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and 61 strikeouts in 491/3 innings over nine starts. As a batter, he’s hitting .289 with six homer runs and 20 RBIs in 34 games.

His emergence had sparked discussion about Ohtani’s potential participation in the upcoming All-Star Game and home run derby. Baseball commissioner Rob Manfred more than once this season has referenced how his popularity has helped the sport overall.

Ohtani was removed from his most recent start Wednesday after four innings because of a recurrence of his blister issue, something that derailed him briefly in April.

By all accounts, the Angels knew nothing of his elbow being a concern until he mentioned the stiffness.

After Ohtani threw a season-high 110 pitches on May 20 in a victory over Tampa Bay, his next start was pushed back because of what the Angels described as “workload management.”

He returned to pitch May 30 in Detroit but was limited to five innings because of a pair of rain delays.

“He helps us win, and it’s tough losing somebody who helps you win,” infielder Zack Cozart said. “We just gotta keep playing. Hopefully, Showy comes back later in the year healthy and ready to help us.”

Ohtani’s status as baseball’s first regular two-way player in 100 years makes even his injuries unique.

Eppler said that were he strictly a designated hitter, Ohtani “probably” could continue playing.

Such a decision, however, would risk Ohtani further damaging his elbow, something Eppler said the Angels are unwilling to do.

The timing of his return also could be impacted by whether the player in question is Ohtani the pitcher or Ohtani the hitter. As a left-handed batter, Ohtani leads with his right arm.

Cozart had elbow ligament replacement surgery on his lead (left) arm in August 2011 and was able to resume hitting normally the next spring.

For now, Scioscia said the Angels will continue to operate with a somewhat flexible rotation, just one not as flexible as it had been with Ohtani. Rookie Jaime Barria is now a candidate to remain with the Angels full-time instead of shuttling between Anaheim and triple-A Salt Lake.

The greater question could be how shifting away from a six-man rotation affects the remaining pitchers, each of whom has performed as if benefiting from the extra rest. Entering Friday, the Angels starters were third in the American League with a 3.58 ERA.

On offense, Ohtani's absence means Albert Pujols could receive more at-bats as the designated hitter with Luis Valbuena, Jefry Marte and the recently promoted Jose Fernandez playing more first base.

"It's a disappointment, but we just have to keep going," Scioscia said. "The schedule doesn't stop. We know he was doing a lot of special things for us ... but you've got to move on."

FROM ANGELS.COM

Kinsler's 2-run HR lifts Halos to 5th straight win

By Maria Guardado

MINNEAPOLIS -- After losing **Andrelton Simmons** and **Shohei Ohtani** to injuries this week, the Angels knew they'd have to look to other sources to plug the glaring holes in their lineup. On Friday night, they got that much-needed production from **Ian Kinsler**, who blasted a go-ahead home run in the seventh inning to lift the Angels to a 4-2 series-opening win over the Twins at Target Field.

"You can't replace those guys, but at the same time, the games don't stop," Kinsler said. "We've got to play the games. We've got to pitch well, we've got to continue to swing the bats. Close ballgames build character, so anytime you can win those ballgames, it's big."

Robbie Grossman homered off **Garrett Richards** to put the Twins ahead, 2-1, in the sixth, but the Angels regained the lead on Kinsler's two-run shot off **Ryan Pressly**. After **Martin Maldonado** lined a one-out double to left field, Kinsler hammered a hanging curveball to left field for his seventh home run of the season. Five of those home runs have come in the last 10 games.

It's an encouraging sign for Kinsler, who is batting .366 over that stretch after hitting just .178 through his first 39 games of the season.

"Sometimes something clicks and you're able to find something that you can work on every day and work off of," Kinsler said.

Justin Upton added an insurance run with his 15th home run of the season, a solo shot off **Addison Reed** in the eighth, and **Blake Parker** worked a scoreless ninth to extend the Angels' winning streak to five games.

Richards allowed two runs on six hits over 5 1/3 innings in the 105-pitch effort. Richards, who walked three and struck out seven, has a 2.09 ERA over his last seven starts.

"Garrett had good stuff," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He got a little tired in the end. The one slider was just a little horizontal to Grossman that he hit out in the sixth inning. But he pitched well."

The Angels got on the board in the second inning after **Zack Cozart**, Jose Miguel Fernandez and Maldonado strung together consecutive singles off Twins right-hander **Lance Lynn**. Cozart produced a one-out base hit before advancing to third on Fernandez's first MLB hit, a single to right-center field. Maldonado shot a first-pitch fastball up the middle to score Cozart, giving the Angels a 1-0 lead.

Chris Young popped out for the second out, but the Angels had a chance to expand their lead after Kinsler reached on an infield single to load the bases for **Mike Trout**. Trout worked a full count before striking out swinging on a 95 mph fastball from Lynn to end the inning.

The Twins came back to tie the game in the bottom half of the inning after **Max Kepler** singled and scored on **Miguel Sano**'s RBI double to left field. Sano bounced a chopper to third base, but the ball took a bad hop and got past **Luis Valbuena**, allowing Kepler to score from first.

"It bounced once and then that second hop, it seemed like it went a different direction or got a little bit higher," Richards said. "It hit something. That was a tough hop for Louie. Unfortunately, it just happened to be enough to where it didn't go too far into the outfield, and he was able to score. It's baseball. It's going to happen."

Richards and Lynn traded zeros over the next three innings to keep the game deadlocked. The Twins threatened in the third after **Eduardo Escobar** delivered a two-out triple to center field, but Richards struck out **Logan Morrison** looking on a nasty curveball to end the inning. Richards' curveball had a spin rate of 3,550 rpm, making it the highest-spin curveball strikeout **Statcast™** has ever recorded.

The only other blemish for Richards was misplacing a 2-2 slider to Grossman, who launched it 422 feet to right field to briefly give the Twins a 2-1 lead in the sixth. Richards then walked Kepler on four pitches, prompting Scioscia to turn the game over to his bullpen.

Noe Ramirez, **Jose Alvarez** and Parker combined to pitch 3 2/3 scoreless innings to lock down the win.

"When those guys come in after us, we have full confidence in them to come in and shut the door and get the job done," Richards said. "Tonight was a great game. They picked me up, and the offense picked me up. Hopefully this is some good momentum moving forward."

UP NEXT

Left-hander **Tyler Skaggs** (4-4, 3.27 ERA) will oppose right-hander **Kyle Gibson** (1-3, 3.54 ERA) on Saturday afternoon as the Angels and Twins continue their three-game series at 11:10 a.m. PT at Target Field. Skaggs faced the Twins on May 11 in Anaheim and allowed two runs over six innings in a no-decision. He has allowed two or fewer runs in nine of his 12 starts this season.

Ohtani has UCL sprain, placed on DL

Angels' two-way player will be evaluated in three weeks

By Maria Guardado

MINNEAPOLIS -- Turns out that the Angels have more to worry about than **Shohei Ohtani's** blister.

Two days after Ohtani departed his start against the Royals on Wednesday after four innings with a blister on his right middle finger, the Angels announced that they had placed Ohtani on the disabled list with a Grade 2 sprain of the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. Ohtani, who received both platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections Thursday in Los Angeles, will be evaluated in three weeks.

General manager Billy Eppler said Ohtani complained of stiffness in his elbow after he got his blister drained Wednesday, prompting the Angels to order an MRI exam that revealed the sprain. Yahoo! Sports reported in December that Ohtani had received a PRP injection in October to heal a Grade 1 sprain, which is considered the least severe of UCL injuries. The procedure was disclosed in the medical report that was distributed to all 30 MLB clubs prior to the courtship of the two-way phenom.

The latest announcement of a Grade 2 sprain for Ohtani would seem to indicate the tear has gotten worse, but Eppler said the Angels remain optimistic that he'll be able to avoid Tommy John surgery.

"We're hopeful that he can," Eppler said Friday during a conference call with reporters. "This is completely treatable with the biologic prescription that the doctors recommended."

Eppler said Ohtani made no mention of elbow discomfort before Wednesday. **Garrett Richards**, **Andrew Heaney** and **JC Ramirez** also received stem-cell injections in an attempt to repair damaged UCLs in their throwing elbows, though all but Richards eventually succumbed to Tommy John surgery.

Losing Ohtani for an extended period of time is a significant blow for the Angels, as the 23-year-old rookie had been enjoying virtually unprecedented success as a two-way player this season. He has gone 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and 61 strikeouts over 49 1/3 innings as a right-handed pitcher and batted .289 with a .907 OPS and six home runs over 129 plate appearances as a left-handed hitter.

"Naturally, it's a disappointment, but you keep going," manager Mike Scioscia said. "Just like we're losing Andrelton [Simmons] for a little bit, you keep going. The schedule doesn't stop, and you can't take a timeout. We know that he was doing a lot of special things for us, but we've got to absorb it and move on."

Eppler said Ohtani would have "probably" been able to play through the UCL injury if he were exclusively a designated hitter, but the Angels didn't want to put him at further risk by having him continue to bat as he recovers.

"I think if he was only a designated hitter and that's all he was, probably," Eppler said. "But that's not his circumstance, and that's not how we want to utilize him as a player and realize the impact of the player. It was determined that any unique swing or variability could impose some small percentage increase in

risk, so that's why we're going to give it the three weeks' time period right now to further assess and then make a determination at that time."

The Angels had often used a six-man rotation to accommodate Ohtani's once-a-week pitching schedule this season, but the need for an extra starter will be reduced now that Ohtani is on the DL. The Angels will likely call up rookie **Jaime Barria** on Tuesday in Seattle to join Richards, Heaney, **Tyler Skaggs** and **Nick Tropeano** in the rotation.

"There's going to be some stretches where we can definitely be five men," Scioscia said. "I think just like we did with Shohei in there, we went kind of week to week and saw how things are going. We'll continue to do that. We'll get Jaime Barria up here at some point and see where our rotation takes us."

Scioscia added that the Angels will rotate players at the DH spot, though **Albert Pujols** will likely figure prominently at that position. Pujols, **Luis Valbuena** and **Jefry Marte** could see time at first base, along with Jose Miguel Fernandez, who was called up from Triple-A Salt Lake on Friday and started at first against the Twins in his MLB debut.

Fernandez, a 30-year-old Cuban infielder who signed a Minor League deal with the Angels over the offseason, endured a long, winding road to the big leagues. He starred for Matanzas in the Serie Nacional for eight seasons, hitting .319 with an .822 OPS as a left-handed hitter, before attempting to defect from Cuba in 2014. Things did not go as planned, however, and he wasn't allowed to play baseball until he was permitted to leave the island legally in 2015.

Fernandez signed with the Dodgers for \$200,000 in January 2017, but he was released at the end of the season and later latched on with the Angels. He was batting .345 with a .973 OPS, 10 home runs and 39 RBIs in 53 games with Triple-A Salt Lake this season. Fernandez said he cried when he was told that he was being promoted to the Majors on Thursday.

"It's a dream come true to be here in the big leagues," Fernandez said in Spanish. "I called my family in Cuba and told my father, all my family over there. I wanted to share the joy that I had with him."

The Angels also placed utility man **Kaleb Cowart** on the 10-day disabled list with a left ankle sprain and recalled infielder **Nolan Fontana** from Triple-A Salt Lake. Scioscia said Cowart hurt himself while stepping off the team bus on Thursday morning in Minneapolis. It's the second time in the last week that an Angel has been injured by stairs, as Simmons also suffered an ankle sprain after slipping on the dugout steps during pregame warmups Tuesday.

"I think you know you're under a rain cloud when guys are getting hurt not in baseball activities," Scioscia said. "He was coming off the bus yesterday morning. He just missed a step and twisted his ankle. Freak injury."

FROM THE ATHLETIC**Shohei Ohtani's injury impacts the Angels' rotation, their lineup and their marketing**

By Steve Dilbeck

Him again. Their old friend, back to haunt once more. Tommy John spent 3½ seasons at the end of his storied career with the Angels, but now it's like his presence will never leave.

Friday, the Angels announced their worst, if most familiar, kind of news: prized two-way star Shohei Ohtani was placed on the disabled list with a Grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament. Their immediate reaction was to give him a platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injection Thursday in an effort to avoid surgery, a procedure they have had mixed results with.

All that is certain for now is that Ohtani will begin treatment in two or three days and will be re-evaluated in three weeks. The loss of Ohtani will have the kind of ripple effect that perhaps no team has ever had to deal with: It impacts their rotation, their lineup and their marketing.

As a starting pitcher, Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and 61 strikeouts in 49 1/3 innings. As a batter, he is hitting .289 with six home runs, 20 RBI and a .907 OPS mark in 114 at-bats. He typically hit as the DH four times a week, batting fifth.

As a promotional component, he gave the Angels attention not only locally, but both nationally and internationally. The curious came out to see what the 23-year-old phenom would do next. For a team that has struggled to receive much acclaim outside of Orange County, that kind of interest is almost impossible to replace.

The Angels went to a six-man rotation to accommodate Ohtani, who battled an ankle injury last season in Japan and pitched just 25 1/3 innings. Their immediate reaction to his loss might be to return to a five-man rotation, though even on that general manager Billy Eppler hesitated.

"We'll take it day by day," Eppler said.

The surprising rotation had been one of the great question marks surrounding the Angels heading into the season, based largely on Tommy John issues. Starters Tyler Skaggs, Garrett Richards, Andrew Heaney and Nick Tropeano are all recovering from TJ surgery. And already this season, they lost starter JC Ramírez and relievers Keynan Middleton and Blake Wood to the ligament transfer surgery.

They could make rookie surprise Jaime Barria (5-1, 2.48 ERA) a permanent addition to the rotation. They do not need a fifth starter until Tuesday in Seattle.

If it's determined Ohtani does require the surgery, he theoretically could pitch again at the end of next season. Another possibility, though less likely, is the Angels could elect to simply use him the rest of this season only as a hitter. There are many ways to go with such a unique player.

“I’m not a big playing up the hypotheticals and all the permutations,” Eppler said. “Clearly there are more permutations with this guy because of the multidimensional way he contributes.

“I’m just going to take every day as it comes and put him on this course of recovery and strengthening for the next three weeks and then deal with what we have to deal with in three weeks’ time.”

At the plate, the loss of Ohtani likely means more of Albert Pujols at DH and less at first base. On Friday, the Angels called up first baseman José Fernández — a 30-year-old who joined the Angels from Cuba last year — and started him against the Twins in Minnesota.

Now, there is little for the Angels to do but wait, and cross their fingers as Tommy John looms again.

Shohei Ohtani’s standout rookie season is in jeopardy as the possibility of Tommy John surgery looms

By Fabian Ardaya

For at least three weeks, all the Angels — and the baseball world — can do is wait.

Two-way star Shohei Ohtani’s season, or at least a large portion of it, is in jeopardy as an MRI on Thursday revealed a Grade 2 sprain of the ulnar collateral ligament of his right elbow. He received a platelet-rich plasma (PRP) and stem-cell injection into his right elbow from Dr. Steve Yoon in Los Angeles in an effort to heal the damaged UCL, and will be re-evaluated in three weeks.

Ohtani, who left his start Wednesday against Kansas City after four innings due to a recurring blister issue on his right middle finger, complained of added soreness in his elbow while the Angels’ medical staff drained the finger, general manager Billy Eppler said. He alerted the medical officials, prompting the MRI.

A Grade 2 strain is the second-most significant amount of damage that can be done to a UCL, typically including a slight tear to the ligament, not simple stretching (Grade 1) or a full-on tear (Grade 3). Tommy John surgery, which would end his season and take 12-16 months to heal, is undoubtedly an option, though Eppler said Friday he remained “hopeful” Ohtani could avoid the procedure.

“We’re hopefully that he can (avoid surgery), that it is completely treatable with the biological prescription the doctors recommended,” Eppler said on a conference call.

Reports surfaced in December, weeks after Ohtani signed with the Angels, indicating that he had a Grade 1 sprain of the UCL in his right elbow stemming from his days in Japan. He underwent a PRP injection on Oct. 20, according to the report by Yahoo! Sports. The physical obtained in the report also revealed a “small free body” floating in the elbow, which typically leads to added damage to the UCL and other ligaments.

The impact, even without full details on the severity, is massive. The 23-year-old rookie right-hander and designated hitter should miss significant time, even if the damaged ligament shows healing over the

next three weeks. In that time, he will not be able to throw and would be limited to a strength and conditioning and therapy program after a 48- to 72-hour rest period, meaning he would have to re-start a throwing program from scratch even if the evaluation in three weeks shows healing.

Yankees right-hander Masahiro Tanaka also suffered a partially-torn UCL during his rookie season in 2014, and underwent a PRP injection to promote regeneration of the ligament. He missed six weeks, returning to a big-league mound on Sept. 21 that year after not pitching since July 8.

The Angels, unfortunately, have experience in dealing with UCL injuries, Tommy John and the alternative biological measures that come with it. Last month, *The Athletic* dissected the glut of UCL injuries done to Angels arms over the past four years, with closer Keynan Middleton at that time being the most recent member of the list. In the time since that piece, two more Angels pitchers, Blake Wood and Ohtani, have missed time with UCL injuries.

The victims of UCL damage to their pitching elbows since 2014, in chronological order along with their method of treatment: Tyler Skaggs (Tommy John surgery), Garrett Richards (stem-cell injection), Andrew Heaney (failed stem-cell injection, then surgery), Nick Tropeano (surgery), JC Ramírez (failed PRP injection, then surgery), Middleton (surgery), Wood (surgery) and now Ohtani (PRP, stem-cell injection).

The injuries to Ramirez, Middleton, Wood and Ohtani have all occurred even after the Angels revamped their training and medical staff prior to the 2017 season, though, as stated, Ohtani had some UCL damage prior to coming to the Angels. Richards was the only player of the eight to return to the mound without requiring surgery, returning that season to pitch in the Arizona Fall League. Eppler said he doesn't worry about prior successes with alternative measures when concerning Ohtani.

"Every player is unique," Eppler said. "I just try to stay as neutral as possible. When we get feedback from our staff and the medical staff, then I'll deal with that and adjust or stay on course based on that. Just trying to stay neutral and realize everybody is unique."

Ohtani's case is also interesting due to his pitch types. Along with throwing a fastball that has topped out at more than 100 mph this season and averaged 96.8 mph this season, according to Baseball Savant, it his use of the splitter — 22.9 percent of the time — that has raised eyebrows when it comes to the safety of his elbow. Some baseball types consider that pitch to strain the elbow more than other pitches. Eppler said Ohtani's frequent use of perhaps his best pitch is not a concern, given his engagements in discussions with Dr. Glenn S. Fleisig, a Tommy John expert who has done several studies for the American Sports Medicine Institute over the past decade.

"He has not found statistical significance in split-finger usage, mostly because of the sampling on that," Eppler said. "I will just tell you that we'll just take it as it comes, and the player's comfort level as he goes back into his throwing progression will dictate everything that we do. I couldn't really say one way or another in terms of specifics. I know there's still a lot of discussion out on particular pitch types and the amount of stress they put on the elbow."

In that case of *if*, as in *if* Ohtani were to need surgery, it's likely he would either need an additional or a conjunctive procedure to clean up the rest of his elbow, as Cincinnati Reds team physician Tim Kremchek told *The Athletic* last month when discussing Tommy John.

“The elbow’s made some adaptive changes, and it forms spurs. Gets inflammation. You have loose bodies,” Kremchek said. “You can address that stuff in conjunction with the UCL. Lots of times, you’ll go arthroscopic, clean it out first and then, a few weeks later, do the Tommy John. Occasionally, we’ll do them together.”

The Angels have been quite careful in their handling of Ohtani this season, particularly on the mound. Wednesday marked just the second time he’d pitched in 17 days, with the club skipping a scheduled start in New York due to “workload management.” He missed another start earlier this season after turning his ankle. Just as they did Wednesday, the Angels removed Ohtani from an April start against the Red Sox with a blister on that same middle finger, though he did not miss a start.

Ohtani’s two-way designation makes him a unique case. As has been the case with White Sox prospect Micker Adolfo and other position players, Ohtani could theoretically serve as a designated hitter and play as a one-way player the rest of the season or up until the club eventually decides to do the surgery, pushing back the recovery timetable until it best suits the organization. In such a hypothetical, the player would be fitted with a brace to keep the elbow steady as they extend, as would be the case for Ohtani, a right-hander pitcher and left-handed hitter.

“You could tell that it’s looser when it’s torn. But the biggest thing for me was, you’re fine (stretched a little bit), fine here, but once you get to that extension, you don’t have that ligament to help stop it,” Angels third baseman Zack Cozart told *The Athletic* last month. Cozart, a right-handed thrower and hitter, tore the UCL on his left elbow in a freak injury in 2011. “Every time you get to (full extension), you hyperextend it every time you don’t have that ligament there.”

Ohtani could also conceivably begin swinging a bat within months of surgery if the Angels had had the surgery immediately.

“You usually can start hitting pretty quick after Tommy John. And if you need Tommy John and you injure your ligament, you can still hit, or at least most of the guys can still hit,” Kremchek said. “You just can’t field your position and throw.

“There are some that cannot hit, that it causes pain when they hit. But by and large, most of the guys can hit.”

Eppler said Friday that, if Ohtani were solely viewed as a designated hitter in the eyes of the organization, he would “probably” be able to hit. However, it is not a hypothetical he would be willing to entertain and jeopardize the organization’s investment in him as a two-way player, and not one or the other.

“It was determined that any unique swing or variability could impose some small percentage increase of risk,” Eppler said. “That’s why we’re going to commit to that three-week time period to further assess and then make a determination at that time.”

FROM ESPN.COM

What you need to know about Shohei Ohtani's injury

By Stephania Bell

The news Friday that dual threat Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels is headed to the disabled list with a Grade 2 ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) sprain in his right (throwing) elbow immediately sent ripples through the baseball world. Ohtani's first two months of play as a part of Major League Baseball have been nothing short of electric, but this turn of events leaves us with more questions than answers.

What *is* known is that the Angels plan to shut Ohtani down from throwing for several weeks to allow his elbow to calm down. On Thursday, Ohtani underwent platelet-rich-plasma (PRP) and stem cell injections to help alleviate pain and inflammation and to facilitate healing. As Angels general manager Billy Eppler indicated, Ohtani will rest for the first 48 to 72 hours and the team then will initiate a progressive physical therapy regimen. In approximately three weeks, he will be re-evaluated to determine the next steps. In other words, there is no definitive timetable for his return, nor is there any definitive indication that Ohtani is headed for surgery.

And thus we are left to wonder the following questions:

How serious is this injury?

Technically speaking, a Grade 2 (moderate) sprain is a partial tearing of the ligament, whereas a Grade 3 sprain represents a complete tear. The amount of damage to the ligament in a Grade 2 sprain or partial tear can vary widely. When it comes to the UCL -- a complex ligament composed of several different bands -- the location of the tear within the tissue and the quality of the tissue also can be factors for consideration. The injury does not have to be a complete tear of the ligament to require surgery; if an athlete continues to experience discomfort and is unable to perform at a competitive level, surgery becomes more likely.

When a blowout UCL injury occurs, it is clearly serious. The pitcher grabs his elbow in obvious pain, typically after making an errant throw, and clinical examination and imaging tests serve to confirm what the thrower already senses -- that surgery is imminent. However, this mechanism of injury is relatively rare.

Far more common are vague complaints that, frankly, do not sound particularly ominous but still have the potential to be serious: stiffness in the elbow (as Ohtani described), tightness in the triceps (Yu Darvish's complaint when he exited a spring start for the Rangers in 2015), or tightness in the forearm (Taijuan Walker of the Arizona Diamondbacks earlier this spring).

Ohtani's injury has caused enough concern within the Angels' organization that the move was made to shut him down immediately.

What is the likelihood that Ohtani will need Tommy John surgery?

The UCL does not need to be completely torn for a thrower to require surgery. As I wrote in 2014 about former Mets pitcher Matt Harvey, who was diagnosed with a partial tear of the UCL in his right elbow:

When a pitcher suffers a blowout injury (not actually that common), the decision to go to surgery is fairly easy to make. More often, however, the picture is clouded by inconsistency in terms of both pain and function along with incomplete damage to the ligament itself.

Of course, Harvey ended up undergoing Tommy John surgery to repair his partially torn UCL.

As noted above, the symptoms for Darvish and Walker were not particularly dramatic and both had only partial tears of their respective UCLs. Still, both pitchers underwent Tommy John surgery.

Perhaps the most important factor in determining if an athlete undergoes reconstructive surgery is whether or not he can return to perform at his pre-injury level. Yes, it is the athlete who ultimately makes the decision as to the path he will take after digesting all of the medical information and recommendations. Tommy John surgery is not to be taken lightly given the lengthy recovery process, and generally pitchers choose it as their last resort.

There are pitchers who have successfully returned to competition with only conservative treatment. Masahiro Tanaka of the New York Yankees was diagnosed with a partial UCL tear and underwent PRP injections and rehab, returning to the mound just over two months later. Ohtani's teammate Garrett Richards underwent stem cell injection therapy in 2016 and returned to action in 2017. Richards' 2017 campaign was interrupted due to nerve irritation in his throwing arm, but after returning late in 2017, he started the 2018 season on time.

It should be noted that while these injection therapies have shown some promise given the success stories of several pitchers, the jury is still out on their efficacy. Others -- including another Ohtani teammate, Andrew Heaney -- have undergone similar treatment and failed. In 2016, Heaney first underwent stem cell injection therapy but ultimately needed TJ surgery.

Did Ohtani's pre-existing UCL injury suggest he was at a greater risk for a more serious UCL injury?

It did. How could it not? A ligament that exhibits some evidence of wear and tear is more susceptible to further injury than one that does not. But the mere presence of risk doesn't dictate when or how that risk will manifest itself down the line. Ohtani was universally viewed by all the teams scouting him as a player who came with some risk ... but he also presented a unique talent. Organizational decisions on whether or not to sign, draft or trade for players are always made with a risk-versus-reward value proposition in mind. Medical information is one component of the risk calculation and each team must determine just how significant that factor is.

And it's no secret that *all* pitchers, especially those with a history of a high volume of work combined with the ability to throw blistering fastballs, present some level of risk. Ohtani is an unusual case because of what he brings in terms of his skill set at the plate as well as on the mound. But star pitchers who can grow with an organization are sought after more than ever, even if damage to their throwing elbow already has occurred or if there is a hint that it may be imminent.

Why? Undoubtedly, the relative success of pitchers to return to (or, in the case of draftees, exceed) their prior level of function following Tommy John surgery has played a role.

Consider the case of Walker Buehler, a first-round draft pick in 2015 who was signed by the Dodgers even though they knew he might require surgery. After a brief visit to the majors last year, Buehler is back pitching for the big league club in 2018. With a fastball hovering near 96 mph and an array of impressive pitching stats (2.74 ERA, 1.02 WHIP, 4.6 K/BB ratio), Buehler looks to be delivering early returns on the team's investment.

Could Ohtani potentially still serve as a hitter even if his elbow won't allow him to pitch?

This is where things get interesting. Ohtani is a right-handed pitcher who bats left. His injured elbow is his lead elbow when hitting. Why does this matter? Because the stress on this elbow is minimal when he is swinging the bat.

It would seem that even if Ohtani's arm does not allow him to throw again this season, he could potentially remain involved as a hitter. Of course, should he ultimately require surgery, remaining on the active roster as a hitter would delay the operation. With the average recovery time following Tommy John surgery hovering around 14 months for pitchers, a postseason surgery for Ohtani would translate to a potential resumption of pitching in 2020.

But consider this: Should it be determined at the end of a trial of conservative treatment that Ohtani requires surgery, the soonest he likely would be ready to return to pitching would be the start of the 2020 season. Hmm.

Notice that the 14-month timeline post-operatively refers to a return to pitching. But what about hitting? For the same reason Ohtani could potentially remain on the roster as a hitter prior to surgery, he could also return sooner to the roster as a hitter post-surgery. Position players return to their full pre-injury level of participation following Tommy John surgery more quickly than pitchers. Given that their positional demands place less stress on the elbow; they are specifically cleared even sooner to resume hitting, potentially as early as four months. Could Ohtani potentially contribute in one dimension while continuing to work his way back in another? At the very least it would present an interesting option for the Angels should he be a candidate for surgery.

For the time being, the Angels are focusing on Ohtani's treatment plan with the hope that he will be able to resume a throwing progression and return to action. How the organization decides to proceed if Ohtani struggles when he tries to throw is something that can wait.

"I'm just going to take every day as it comes and put him on this course of recovery and strengthening for the next three weeks and then deal with what we've got to deal with in three weeks' time," Eppler said.

The one-day-at-a-time plan is the only thing right now that is certain when it comes to Ohtani's fate.

FROM SPORTS ILLUSTRATED**Shohei Ohtani's Trip to the Disabled List is the Cruellest News of the Year**

By Jon Tayler

Shohei Ohtani has made words feel paltry. As the two-way Japanese superstar plowed through opposing lineups with his triple-digit fastball and devilish splitter, then battered pitchers with booming home runs, it didn't feel like English—or any other language, for that matter—had what was necessary to capture how great and crazy his success was. Here was a 23-year-old rookie looking like a marriage of Bryce Harper and Max Scherzer, blessing us with wondrous starts and terrific at-bats, and emerging as the biggest story in the sport since Barry Bonds broke the game. Ohtani wasn't just good; he was marvelous, magic, a miracle. He was a gift.

And now that gift has been cruelly snatched away thanks to two words that spell nothing but doom and gloom: UCL sprain. On Friday afternoon, the Angels announced that Ohtani—who left his start on Wednesday against Kansas City with what was believed to be a blister—will be sidelined for at least the next three weeks, and likely much longer, with a grade 2 UCL sprain in his right (pitching) elbow. For those unfamiliar with what that means, it's another way of saying that he has a partial tear of the ulnar collateral ligament—an injury that, more often than not, leads to Tommy John surgery and 12–18 months on the shelf. “Bad” doesn't begin to describe that result for Ohtani, the Angels, and baseball fans in general. The question now is just how painful will this be for all parties.

The one silver lining is that a partial tear of the UCL is just that—partial. It's not the worst possible outcome—that would be a Grade 3 sprain, or a full tear, which always requires surgery—and can be rehabilitated without going under the knife. Common treatment involves rest and physical therapy; in Ohtani's case, he's also received stem cell injections and platelet-rich plasma therapy to help with the healing process. If all goes according to plan, a player can theoretically return to action within a few months.

Such is the path that other notable names have followed: Adam Wainwright, Masahiro Tanaka, and Angels teammate Garrett Richards, to name a few, all avoided Tommy John surgery despite partial UCL tears. In Tanaka's case, he spent roughly 10 weeks on the disabled list in 2014, from early July until late September, before returning to the Yankees. Wainwright, meanwhile, survived two separate partial tears—first in high school, then in the minor leagues—before his elbow finally gave out in 2011 after his first four seasons with the Cardinals. And Richards successfully avoided surgery after suffering a high-grade UCL tear in May 2016, though rehab ate up what was left of his year.

But for every pitcher who's triumphed over Tommy John, several others haven't been so lucky. The Angels have proof of both in Richards and in rotation-mate Andrew Heaney. The latter hurt his UCL early in the 2016 season and tried to rehab it but ultimately was forced to undergo surgery that July, which cost him not only the rest of that year but also the entirety of the '17 campaign. Every elbow—and, subsequently, every ligament tear—is different and responds differently to treatment. So while some pitchers walk away relatively unscathed, others have no such luck, and neither teams nor players know which side of the ledger they'll fall on until after the rehab begins.

Regardless of how long Ohtani is out for, though, it's a loss that Los Angeles can ill afford, as he's been a difference maker on both sides of the ball. On the mound, he's posted a 3.10 ERA and 132 ERA+ in 49 1/3 innings along with a whopping 61 strikeouts; among all pitchers with 40 or more innings on the year, his strikeout percentage of 30.5 is 11th-best in baseball. At the plate, he's been just as impactful, hitting .289/.372/.535 with six homers as the semi-regular DH; his 149 OPS+ is second only to demi-god Mike Trout on the team. Add it all up, and Ohtani's 0.9 WAR puts him fourth on the roster in total value, trailing Trout, Gold Glove shortstop Andrelton Simmons, and mashing outfielder Justin Upton.

Ohtani has been a big part of the Angels' strong 35–28 start to the season, one that has them in third place in the AL West (4 ½ games behind Seattle) and 3 ½ games back of Houston for the second wild card. But those positions are now dangerously tenuous with Ohtani out, even though he'd been limited to roughly a start and 15–20 at-bats per week. It's not that the Angels have to worry about being caught in either the West or wild-card races: Their biggest competition in both is Oakland, currently a game above .500, followed by a raft of struggling pseudo-contenders in Detroit, Tampa Bay, Minnesota and Toronto, all with losing records. But a weakened Los Angeles team will have a tougher time keeping pace with either the Astros, owners of the best run differential in baseball at a staggering +121, or the red-hot Mariners, winners of 15 of their last 21.

In truth, Ohtani's injury is good news only for Seattle and Houston, as well as Yankees second baseman Gleyber Torres, who now stands alone atop the AL Rookie of the Year leaderboard. For everyone else, it's a crushing blow (especially for MLB, which lost its newest and most hyped star). It's also a painful reminder that, no matter how special they are, pitchers break with alarming regularity, even if you take all the care in the world. That was the case with Ohtani, who was handled as delicately as a Faberge egg in his arrival to the United States. The Angels built a six-man rotation to give him more rest between outings, didn't allow him to hit before, during or after his starts, and tried as hard as possible to keep his innings and pitch counts low. No matter: He still got hurt, because the act of throwing a baseball is inevitably ruinous to elbows, shoulders and all other parts of the arm.

All injuries are unfair, but Ohtani's loss feels significantly more so—a transcendent talent cut down in the midst of a truly special and rare season. As a modifier, “unique” is deployed too often (and usually with incorrect or unnecessary descriptors), but it's what best defines Ohtani, who is a player unlike any other. It felt like there was no limit to what he could do, and you could have easily imagined him stealing the stage at this year's All-Star Game, or dominating as the starter in the wild-card game, or carrying the Angels into and through the playoffs.

Now, all those hopes have been dashed—maybe only for a short while, but perhaps for longer. There are few if any words that can sum up just how much that hurts.

FROM THE RINGER**Great, Now We Have to Watch Every Shohei Ohtani Start Through Our Fingers**

The Angels' two-way phenom has been placed on the disabled list with a right-elbow sprain

By Michael Baumann

Angels two-way player Shohei Ohtani has traversed previously uncharted territory during his young MLB career. But on Friday afternoon, he arrived at a place that, while new to him, is familiar to many of his colleagues: the disabled list.

Ohtani lasted just four innings in his start against the Royals on Wednesday thanks to a recurrence of the blister that knocked him out of action in Boston in April, but this DL trip is the result of a grade 2 sprain of the UCL in his right elbow, an unrelated and far more troubling injury. The UCL is the ligament that gets replaced during Tommy John surgery, making it the most famous piece of connective tissue in a pitcher's body, and while any injury to the UCL now raises concerns that it might tear in the future, the only good news so far is that the sprain isn't quite so severe just yet.

On Thursday, Ohtani received injections of platelet-rich plasma and stem cells, and doctors will evaluate his recovery in three weeks. In other words, take this syringe of healing juice and call me after the group stage of the World Cup. After a three-week layoff, Ohtani would then likely need more time to rebuild his arm strength before returning to big league action even if everything goes well.

It will surprise none of you to learn that this is very bad news for Ohtani, the Angels, baseball in general, and the planet Earth. Ohtani is special because he can pitch *and* play DH while taking up just one roster spot, but that cuts both ways as the Angels are also without the DH while the pitcher heals. Ohtani is, if not Los Angeles's best pitcher, then in a virtual tie for that honor with Tyler Skaggs and Garrett Richards — neither of whom has a Nolan Ryanesque track record of durability himself. Plus, Ohtani isn't only their second-best hitter, behind Mike Trout, but he's the only contributing lefty bat in a lineup that begs to be Sergio Romo'd. The Angels are in third place in the AL West, behind not only the favored Astros but also the surprising Seattle Mariners, and would've faced an uphill climb to the playoffs even without the injuries they've sustained. But now Ohtani will join starting shortstop Andrelton Simmons and closer Keynan Middleton on the shelf.

Baseball at large, meanwhile, faces at least a month without its most interesting player, and even when Ohtani returns, the experience of watching him will come with hints of anxiety. Ohtani already seems precious and fragile by virtue of his youth, his slight build, and his 100 mph fastball — now we're more aware that any one pitch could snap his UCL and put him on the shelf for 12 to 18 months. Life is an unending series of torments. Call me in three weeks.

FROM YAHOO! SPORTS**The sad tale of how Shohei Ohtani's torn elbow ligament ruined baseball's best story of 2018**

By Jeff Passan

Inside his office, above the oversized, high-definition monitor where he shows injured baseball players images of their damaged elbow ligaments, Dr. Naotaka Mamizuka hung a row of photographs. Most were him posing with patients, famous athletes in Japan, celebrities, the sorts who would elicit an ooh or an aah from the everyday people he saw. One person in particular stood out to his clientele.

"That's Ohtani," Mamizuka said. "Do you know him?"

I did. Everybody in the baseball world knew Shohei Ohtani. It was August 2014, and I was in Mito, a two-hour train ride from Tokyo up the east coast of Japan, where Mamizuka practiced. He spent most of his time performing spinal surgeries. Twice a week, for four hours a day, baseball players would flood his office – up to two dozen a day, if he could cram them into his schedule, and occasionally fewer, if someone important was coming to visit.

Shohei Ohtani qualified as important. He was 20 years old, in the midst of his first full season with the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters, and was the future of Japanese baseball. His fastball regularly clocked in at 100 mph, sometimes faster, harder than any Japanese pitcher ever had thrown. He could also hit, with rare power in a league that produces scant sluggers. He had seen Mamizuka to get a sense of his arm's health. All was well.

This heartened Mamizuka. It also scared him. He had seen thousands of elbow MRIs, turning a curiosity in baseball medicine into an expertise perhaps unmatched in Japan. That day he examined 20 children, ages 9 to 17. He diagnosed injuries in 19 of them. Japanese baseball, a year-round pursuit in which the best teams practice 360 days a year, taking a short break only at Christmastime, runs through elbow ligaments with the efficiency of a plow through dirt. That Ohtani escaped without severe damage to his ulnar collateral ligament, the triangular band of tissue that holds together the upper and lower bones of the arm and allows man to throw a baseball, felt to Mamizuka something of a miracle. Like, maybe this athlete blessed with the ability to throw like few others and hit with great force happens to be the outlier with regard to injury, too.

But then he considered all he knew about the elbow, about Ohtani, about the intersection of this fallible piece of tissue with this capacity to throw a ball at amazing speeds, and he harkened back to something he said earlier in the day, when he was imploring a 16-year-old with arm pain not to throw with maximum effort.

"Power is bad," Mamizuka said. "Power is bad."

* * * * *

Nobody knows for certain what causes UCLs to break. It is some combination of usage, movement,

velocity and genetics, and it differs in every player. Players in Japan, and in travel-ball-heavy areas of the United States, suffer because ignorant – or, quite often, selfish – coaches abuse their arms with impunity. Others' movement patterns – mechanics, as they're most often deemed – cause excessive stress and strain and lead to a fraying or acute tearing of the ligament. The speed of one's fastball correlates strongly with UCL damage, though it's not as simple as throw hard, get hurt. DNA's role remains a mystery, but doctors and researchers agree that some players are simply born damned and others hearty enough to withstand extremes in other areas.

Exactly what caused Shohei Ohtani's UCL to break doesn't matter so much as the fact that it's broken. The Los Angeles Angels announced Friday that two months into Ohtani's career in Major League Baseball, he has a grade-2 sprain of the UCL – a partial tear significant enough to warrant Tommy John surgery in thousands of others, from junior high to the major leagues, who have received the same diagnosis. The Angels knew this was a possibility, knew that he had undergone a platelet-rich plasma shot in his elbow in October after being diagnosed with a first-degree sprain, knew that the combination of Japanese usage, his dynamic fastball and a previous injury made him especially susceptible to more.

The plan – another PRP shot, three weeks of rest, reassess – is exactly what the Angels should be doing. On a conference call, their general manager, Billy Eppler, spoke with a rare expertise about UCL injuries, parrying a question about Ohtani's split-fingered fastball perhaps being the culprit by saying the research on the subject simply doesn't support the notion that splitters cause Tommy John surgery. He offered faith in PRP, a treatment that takes blood spun in a centrifuge to concentrate its growth factors, then injects it into the elbow hopeful it will help repair the damage. He also wasn't irrationally optimistic. When asked if he believed Ohtani could avoid Tommy John surgery, the reconstructive procedure named after the first patient to undergo it, Eppler said: "We're hopeful that he can."

The news of further damage to Ohtani's UCL arrived Friday afternoon with great sadness for a sport that had spent the first third of the season marveling at his arrival. He was the best story in baseball, a flame-throwing slugger with elite speed, as if manufactured in some facility that existed solely to create the archetypal ballplayer. The All-Star Game was going to be Ohtani's best chance yet to cultivate the national following a player of his abilities warrants. Now, best-case scenario, he'll be back sometime in July, though that would take the PRP shot working and an incredibly aggressive rehabilitation schedule.

And considering Ohtani's import to the Angels, and their conservatism with him as the season has progressed, they're unlikely to push him back. A grade-2 UCL sprain is no joke. While full-thickness tears of the UCL – the grade-3 variety – always require Tommy John surgery, players who don't respond to initial treatment are given a choice: continue rehab in hopes it improves or undergo the surgery.

The timing of the injury actually gives Ohtani a fair bit of flexibility should the PRP not take. Were he to undergo Tommy John surgery in early July, he almost certainly would miss all of 2019 as well, based on the Angels' history of handling returns from the procedure with excessive caution. Andrew Heaney took 14 months to return, Nick Tropeano 20 months and Tyler Skaggs 23 months. And that's to say nothing of Garrett Richards, who suffered a partial UCL tear, received an injection of stem cells mixed with PRP and returned 11 months later.

The incentive to head straight for the operating table, then, is lessened by the calendar. Ohtani could rehab in June, July and August in hopes that by September the ligament has healed enough to allow a return. Masahiro Tanaka partially tore his UCL in July 2014, received a PRP shot, returned by the end of September and hasn't had a significant recurrence since. If that doesn't work – if the healing is slow or

nonexistent – Ohtani could opt for the surgery then and give himself 17 months of runway before spring training 2020.

Which might as well be a million years away. These Angels were built to win and win now, Ohtani the perfect complement to Mike Trout and the perfect marketing tool for MLB and the perfect person to grow the game internationally if not for the imperfection in his right elbow.

* * * * *

All of this started with a blister on, appropriately, the middle finger. Ohtani left his last start against the Kansas City Royals following four solid innings that lowered his season ERA to 3.10. “He was up getting that blister drained,” Eppler said, “and as the game adrenaline wore off, he then said, ‘My elbow’s getting a little stiff.’ ” The Angels sent Ohtani for an MRI, the scan revealed the tear and so began the latest episode of *Why Can’t We Have Nice Things?*

It’s happened a lot this year. The Angels have lost closer Keynan Middleton, starter J.C. Ramirez and reliever Blake Wood to Tommy John. Three young Rays starting prospects, Brent Honeywell, Jose DeLeon and Anthony Banda, all tore their UCLs. Taijuan Walker, Dinelson Lamet, Jordan Montgomery – all 25 years old, all broken down. And that’s to say nothing of the zipper-scarred pitchers from baseball’s recent past. John Smoltz and Stephen Strasburg returned to carve out wonderful careers. Matt Harvey and hundreds of others not so much.

Every UCL injury is a reminder not just of the arm’s fallibility but baseball’s inability to outline a youth-to-pros plan that lessens the number of pitchers whose arms simply cannot stand up to the expectations of the sport’s max-effort, max-velocity culture. When it shelves anyone, it’s problematic. When it waylays the game’s most fascinating character, the damage runs far deeper.

Even if it was somewhat preordained – grade-1 tears wind up grades 2 or 3 regularly – there was still, among the masses who have been smitten by Ohtani, almost a willful blindness to the possibility that it would happen now, this soon, like the elbow wouldn’t dare ruin a season like this. By now it should be obvious that the elbow spares no one, not even a person who leverages it into doing special things.

No, it’s unforgiving and apologetic to no one and snagged another victim this week, and for all the hope that the PRP takes or that rest works its magic, the best Eppler could muster was “hopeful.” Kind of like Dr. Naotaka Mamizuka four years ago, when he pondered Shohei Ohtani, his young patient, the one with the arm and the bat and the most important part of all, the health. The kid who seemed to have everything until he didn’t.

FROM USA TODAY**Shohei Ohtani's elbow injury not only a blow to Angels, but all of baseball**

By Bob Nightengale

The news was gut-wrenching, not just to the Los Angeles Angels, but for all of Major League Baseball.

Angels rookie star Shohei Ohtani, who had captivated the sport with his arm and his bat as the game's finest two-way player since Babe Ruth, was placed on the disabled list Friday with a sprained elbow, with Tommy John surgery now a distinct possibility.

Ohtani, who would have been the showcase of the All-Star Game, likely becoming the first player to ever hit and pitch at the midsummer event, will be out until at least late July, and that's only if everything goes well.

If Ohtani's Grade 2 sprain of his ulnar collateral ligament does not improve in three weeks after undergoing therapy -- that included a platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injection Thursday -- he could be out until the 2020 season.

If Ohtani wanted to only be the Angels' full-time designated hitter, and forego pitching, it's possible he could return, even if Tommy John surgery is recommended.

For now, it's not an option that the Angels are even considering.

"I'm not a big fan playing out the hypotheticals and all of the permutations," Angels GM Billy Eppler said. "The multi-dimensional way he contributes, I'm going to take every day as it comes and put him on this course of recovery. Then, in three weeks when we evaluate him, we'll deal with what we have to deal with."

Ohtani, who was living up to every bit of the hype this season, going 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA in nine starts, and hitting .289 with six homers in 114 at-bats, first informed the Angels of his elbow after leaving Wednesday's start against the Kansas City Royals. He left after four innings, and was having the blister drained, Eppler said, when he informed the trainers that his elbow was getting stiff.

He underwent an MRI that revealed the Grade 2 sprain and didn't accompany the Angels on their flight to Minnesota.

Now, the Angels can only hold their breath and wait.

Ohtani was originally diagnosed with a Grade 1 sprain last year in Japan. He underwent the platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections in October, and had no setbacks. He was throwing 101 mph in his last start and until Wednesday, never mentioned any comfort.

"You've seen what he was doing on the mound this year," Eppler said, "so it stands to reason that the injection was helpful."

Yet, going from a Grade 1 sprain to a Grade 2 sprain in eight months, with a Grade 3 signifying Tommy John surgery, it's hard to feel any real sense of optimism.

There's no one to blame for the injury. The Angels, who have had eight pitchers sustain elbow ligament damage since 2014, treated him with absolute caution all season. He was pitching just once a week. He never was used as a hitter before or after any start.

But now this.

The Angels, publicly and privately, have no idea whether he'll need Tommy John, or whether he'll be able to pitch with the injury later this summer.

The baseball landscape is littered with pitchers that have been able to pitch with UCL tears without requiring surgery, including Masahiro Tanaka of the New York Yankees.

So there is hope.

But also fear.

Ohtani will be back, of course, and perhaps sooner than anyone anticipates if everything goes well.

Yet, there's also the possibility that Ohtani undergoes Tommy John surgery, and when he returns, it's only as a pitcher, needing all of the rehab to focus on his arm, not his hitting mechanics.

You feel awful for the Angels, a franchise that's been cursed for decades, with Mike Trout 2 ½ years away from free agency, and still never having won a playoff game.

You feel terrible for Ohtani, 23, who forfeited at least \$200 million in free agency by pursuing his major-league dreams two years early instead of waiting until he turned 25 when there would be no international spending limits.

Ohtani is earning just the minimum \$545,000 salary, and may never see that kind of money again.

And, of course, you feel horrible for every baseball fan in the world.

You don't have to be an Angels' fan to appreciate him, respect him, or revere him.

We can only hope he comes back, as quickly as possible, for our own selfish reasons, because, man, it's sure fun watching him.

FROM THE NEW YORK POST

Angels address Tommy John fears as Shohei Ohtani hits DL

By Zach Braziller

The Angels are officially holding their breath. Shohei Ohtani is headed to the disabled list, and his return date is unknown.

The two-way star was shelved on Friday with a grade 2 sprain of the UCL in his right pitching elbow, the team announced. For now, the Angels hope to avoid him having to go under the knife. He will be evaluated in three weeks after getting a PRP and stem-cell injection on Thursday in Los Angeles.

Ohtani left after four innings on Wednesday against the Royals due to a blister on his right hand that previously was an issue for him in April. He complained about the elbow being stiff after the blister was drained, leading to an MRI, general manager Billy Eppler told Angels reporters.

Whether Ohtani can avoid Tommy John surgery, which is sometimes needed for severe UCL injuries, Eppler said: "We're hopeful that he can, that it is completely treatable with the biologic prescription the doctors recommended."

It is uncertain if he could go back to merely hitting after he is evaluated in three weeks. Shortly after Ohtani signed with the Angels in December, Yahoo Sports reported he had a first-degree sprain of the UCL in his elbow.

Following an underwhelming spring training, Ohtani has more than lived up to the hype that accompanied his move to MLB from Japan this offseason, shining on the mound and in the batter's box. The 23-year-old right-hander is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and 61 strikeouts in 49 1/3 innings pitched. As a designated hitter, Ohtani has posted a stellar .289/.372/.535 slash line with a .907 OPS, six home runs and 20 RBIs in 114 at-bats.

He's been a major factor in the Angels' bounce-back season so far, after the club finished under .500 a year ago. But before this recent four-game winning streak, they had struggled of late, falling 4 1/2 games behind the surprising Mariners in the AL West. And now they have a doubly devastating hole to fill on their roster for the time being.

FROM FORBES.COM

Angels' Shohei Ohtani Hits Disabled List With Right Elbow Strain

By Barry M. Bloom

The other Shohei dropped on Friday when the Los Angeles Angels announced that prized Japanese right-hander Shohei Ohtani was placed on the disabled list and will miss at least three weeks because of a Grade 2 sprain of the ulnar collateral ligament in his pitching elbow.

The disclosure came only two days since Ohtani was removed from a game at Angel Stadium after four innings for what the club said at the time was a blister on the middle finger of his right hand. It was the second time this season he's has suffered from a similar blister.

Because of the elbow, the Angels had been trying to manage Ohtani's pitching innings and Wednesday's start was just his second in 17 days.

The now Grade 2 sprain of the UCL indicates increased damage from the Grade 1 reported last winter after Ohtani signed with the Angels. Grade 3 represents a complete tear.

Ohtani had stem cell and platelet-rich plasma injections on Thursday in Los Angeles, hoping to ward off the obvious: Tommy John ligament replacement surgery, which would put the 23-year-old on the shelf for from 12 to 18 months.

It was Ohtani's second PRP shot since this past October when he finished his last season playing in Japan.

"When he came out of the game the other night, he was up getting that blister drained and as kind of the game adrenaline wore off, he then said, my elbow is getting a little stiff," Angels general manager Billy Eppler said during a conference call with the media on Friday. "So, based on that, they decided to get an imaging.

"For the next 48 to 52 hours, he'll just be really recovering and not active. And then after that time period, he'll be on a strength and conditioning regimen as well as a therapy regimen conducted by our performance staff here."

Eppler added that a further determination of action will be made when Ohtani is re-evaluated in three weeks. He didn't accompany the team to Minnesota where it opens a three-game weekend series against the Twins at Target Field on Friday night.

Ohtani looked uncomfortable pitching the fourth inning on Wednesday. He stomped around the mound at times shaking his right arm as if trying to get loose.

After going out to start the fifth, Ohtani threw a couple of warmup pitches and then signaled to the Angels dugout. Manager Mike Scioscia and trainer Eric Munson came out along with a group of players and chatted briefly with the right-hander, who then headed to the dugout.

Eppler said that the club wasn't aware of any renewed issues with Ohtani's elbow until he said something about it that night.

Ohtani, though still throwing in the mid-90s, had struggled through the fourth, allowing a run on two singles. He also issued a pair of walks to load the bases before striking out Abraham Almonte to end the threat.

He was behind on the count to just about every one of the 18 batters he faced, in only his ninth start in the Major Leagues.

He has thrown had just nine innings since May 20.

Despite his lack of pitching in recent weeks, Ohtani has continued to fill the role of designate hitter, batting .289 with six homers and 20 RBIs. After a run of three homers in three games as DH the first week of the season, he hasn't hit another one since May 17.

Eppler said on Friday the club didn't want Ohtani hitting for the next three weeks on the chance that a swing could further damage the elbow.

The Angels were aware through a medical report that Ohtani's elbow was problematic when he signed a contract last December as a below 25-year-old international free agent for the minimum of \$545,000 and a signing bonus of \$2.31 million. The Angels also had to pay a \$20 million posting fee to Japan's Nippon-Ham Fighters for the rights to sign Ohtani.

The Angels planned on pitching him once a week. But he's fallen short of that goal.

The spacing has been all over the place. Aside from the original blister suffered against the Boston Red Sox on April 17 when he was lifted after two innings, Ohtani sprained his left ankle, running out a grounder on April 27 against the New York Yankees and didn't pitch again until May 6 at Seattle, a break of 13 days between mound starts. He was also pulled from a much-anticipated start on May 27 against Masahiro Tanaka at Yankee Stadium. The Angels gave no apparent reason for that decision.

When he did start on May 30 in a rain-delayed game at Detroit, Ohtani lasted five innings and 83 pitches, allowing a run on three hits with three walks and five strikeouts.

Overall, he's made only the nine starts and is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA, 20 walks and 61 whiffs in 49 1/3 innings. He had a high-water mark of 7 2/3 innings and 110 pitches in a home win over the Tampa Bay Rays on March 20.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**Kinsler, Upton power Angels past Twins 4-2**

By Dave Campbell

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Los Angeles Angels are missing some significant pieces of their team. The Minnesota Twins are down several important players, too.

With a couple of clutch hits and a strong night by the bullpen, the Angels taught a lesson in resiliency. The Twins are still searching for theirs.

Ian Kinsler hit a two-run home run for the lead in the seventh inning and Justin Upton went deep in the eighth, powering the Angels past the Twins 4-2 on Friday after they placed rookie sensation Shohei Ohtani on the disabled list with an elbow injury.

Star shortstop Andrelton Simmons went down this week, too.

“You can’t replace those guys, but at the same time, the games don’t stop,” Kinsler said, adding: “Close ball games build character.”

Blake Parker pitched a perfect ninth inning for his sixth save in seven attempts. Robbie Grossman gave the Twins a 2-1 edge with a solo homer in the sixth against starter Garrett Richards, but Noe Ramirez (2-2) and Jose Alvarez set up Parker with some shut-down relief. The Angels bullpen recorded 11 outs, with five strikeouts.

That’s what the Twins were looking for, after six sharp innings by Lance Lynn to continue his rebound from a rough start to his first season with the team. Ryan Pressly (0-1) gave up a double to Martin Maldonado, but he had two outs and two strikes on Kinsler before hanging a curveball that was crushed into the left-field seats .

“I probably should’ve gone with another pitch, but it is what it is,” Pressly said. “I wanted it down.”

Upton, who took Addison Reed deep , has four homers in his last five games. Kinsler has five home runs in his last 10 games, batting .366 over that span.

“Even though Kinsler hasn’t had his best year, we still know he’s dangerous,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said.

Said Angels manager Mike Scioscia: “Hopefully he’s turned the corner.”

The Twins haven’t yet.

Fifteen of their last 27 games have been decided by one or two runs, and they’re just 6-9 in those games. For the season, they’re 3-12 in one-run games, which, as Molitor said, “is a big reason why we are where we are.”

The Angels are 6-1 in June, trying to keep up in the fast-paced AL West race with Seattle and Houston.

“We’re going to grind it out,” Richards said. “We’re going to find ways to win.”

DROPPED DOWN

Struggling Twins third baseman Miguel Sano was moved to seventh in the batting order, the lowest starting spot of his major league career and only the second time this season he’s been lower than third. Since coming off the disabled list on May 25, Sano is hitting just .189 in 53 at-bats with four walks and 24 strikeouts.

He does have 12 RBIs over those 13 games, including a high chopper to third baseman Luis Valbuena in the second inning that bounced over him to earn a double ruling from the official scorer and drive in Max Kepler from first base. Sano, though, is batting .088 with two strikes (7 for 80) this season.

THE LONG ROAD

With Ohtani out, Albert Pujols was the designated hitter and Jose Fernandez played first base in his major league debut at age 30. He singled in his first at-bat. Fernandez didn’t leave his native Cuba until 2015 and didn’t join a major league organization until 2017, when he played mostly in Double-A in the Los Angeles Dodgers system. He signed with the Angels in January and was promoted from Triple-A Salt Lake on Friday with infielder Nolan Fontana.

LET’S GO CRAZY

The Twins held another “Prince Night,” a heavily themed celebration of the Minneapolis-born-and-raised musician whose 60th birthday would have been on Thursday. The first 10,000 fans through the gates got inflatable plastic purple guitars. Eddie Rosario was spotted strumming one in the dugout as Grossman sent his drive to deep right field, and he leaped to his feet with the souvenir in hand as the ball cleared the wall.

TRAINER’S ROOM

Angels: Rookie infielder Kaleb Cowart also went to the DL with a sprained left ankle. He was hurt when he missed a step off the team bus upon arrival in Minnesota after an overnight flight. Cowart was called up to replace Simmons, who sprained his right ankle on Tuesday when he slipped walking down the dugout stairs.

Twins: First baseman Joe Mauer has plateaued in his recovery from concussion-like symptoms, missing his 20th straight game. Molitor said the team hasn’t reached the point where a decision would be made about sending Mauer on a rehab assignment or not.

UP NEXT

Angels: LHP Tyler Skaggs pitches on Saturday afternoon. Skaggs (4-4, 3.27 ERA), who has surrendered two runs or fewer in nine of his 12 starts, took a no-decision against the Twins on May 11 after giving up two runs on six hits and two walks with seven strikeouts in six innings.

Twins: RHP Kyle Gibson takes the mound in the middle game of the series. Gibson (1-3, 3.54 ERA), who hasn't won in 12 turns since throwing six no-hit innings in his season debut on March 31, gave up two runs on three hits and four walks with six strikeouts in six innings of a no-decision against the Angels on May 12.

Angels star Ohtani out at least 3 weeks with elbow sprain

By Greg Beacham and Dave Campbell

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Shohei Ohtani was put on the disabled list by the Los Angeles Angels with a sprained ligament in his pitching elbow Friday, an ominous injury that will be re-evaluated in three weeks and brought the two-way Japanese sensation's remarkable rookie season to at least a temporary halt.

The Angels said Ohtani's right ulnar collateral ligament has a Grade 2 sprain, which typically indicates some degree of damage but not a complete tear. His injury doesn't always require surgery, while Grade 3 sprains are usually repaired by the Tommy John ligament replacement procedure that takes a year or more to recover from. For all the benefits the Angels have reaped from his nine turns on the mound and 30 starts as the designated hitter, the next feat for Ohtani will be to avoid Tommy John surgery.

"We're hopeful that he can," general manager Billy Eppler said, "that this is completely treatable with the biologic prescription that the doctors recommend."

Ohtani, who will turn 24 next month, underwent injections of platelet-rich plasma and stem cells Thursday in Los Angeles. Eppler, speaking on a conference call with reporters before the Angels began a three-game series at Minnesota, said Ohtani won't throw a ball again until his checkup in three weeks.

"I'm just going to take every day as it comes and put him on this course of recovery and strengthening for the next three weeks and then deal with what we've got to deal with in three weeks' time," Eppler said.

Manager Mike Scioscia expressed a similarly measured reaction, sitting in the dugout at Target Field before his suddenly injury-depleted team faced the Twins.

"The schedule doesn't stop, and you can't take a timeout," Scioscia said, adding: "We've got to absorb it and move on."

Ohtani left his last pitching start after four innings Wednesday due to the recurrence of a blister on his pitching fingers. Only then, Eppler and Scioscia said, did the Angels get their first indication Ohtani's UCL might be distressed. He told the team his elbow was "getting a little stiff" after the adrenaline from the game wore off.

Yahoo Sports reported last December that Ohtani had a Grade 1 sprain of his UCL, but Eppler said at the time there were "no signs of acute trauma" in the ligament. Ohtani also had a PRP injection last October.

As a rookie with the New York Yankees in 2014, right-hander Masahiro Tanaka missed more than two months because of a partially torn UCL, but he was able to rehabilitate the injury rather than have Tommy John surgery. Angels teammate Garrett Richards, who started Friday's game, was also able to avoid the procedure after a similar injury in 2016 and opting for stem-cell treatment instead.

"Hopefully, this works for him. It worked for me," Richards said. "I understand it doesn't work for everybody, but our thoughts are with him and we're going to be right there with him every step of the way."

Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA in his debut North American season. He has 61 strikeouts in 49 1/3 innings with a dazzling mix of 100-mph fastballs and precipitous breaking pitches including a vicious splitter, a pitch which typically puts significant stress on the ligaments. Angels opponents are batting just .202 against him.

Ohtani also is batting .289 with six home runs, 20 RBIs and a .907 on-base-plus-slugging percentage as baseball's most successful two-way player in decades. He's cooled off slightly after a torrid start at the plate, batting .257 with two homers since April.

When the Twins played the Angels last month, batting practice was a must-see.

"Some of the guys just were in awe of the power display," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "We got a glimpse of both his offensive and pitching prowess when we were out there. I wish him well. I think guys like that and stories like that are really good for the game. Hopefully it's not a long-term deal."

Eppler said if the Angels only viewed Ohtani as a hitter, he'd probably be able to keep playing with such an injury. The Angels are paying a \$20 million posting fee to Ohtani's previous club in Japan, the Nippon Ham Fighters, for the right to sign him.

"But that's not his circumstance, and that's not how we want to utilize the player," Eppler said. "It was determined that any unique swing or variability could impose some small percentage increase in risk, so that's why we're going to give it the three-week time period right now."

The Angels have tried to keep Ohtani fresh by giving him at least a week of mound rest between his pitching starts, adhering to a disciplined plan drawn up by Eppler. While Ohtani was eager for more playing time, the Angels didn't want to rush Ohtani into a frantic pace in his first major league season.

The Angels took a four-game winning streak into the opener of their nine-game road trip against the Twins. Any long-term absence for Ohtani could be crushing to a team trying to keep pace in the high-speed AL West race with surprising Seattle and defending World Series champion Houston. The Angels, who entered Friday 4 1/2 games behind the Mariners and 3 1/2 games back of the Astros, have been using a six-man rotation so they could probably withstand his absence from pitching better than hitting because they are short on left-handed hitting.

"We're losing two significant parts to our club," Scioscia said. "I think what he did on the mound obviously up to this point is really special, and that's important to us. And what he does in the batter's box, being a left-handed bat, is very important to us."

FROM SPORTING NEWS**Shohei Ohtani's UCL injury will likely keep him off All-Star stage – and that's a bummer**

By Jason Foster

The best story in baseball got an unwanted intermission Friday with the news that two-way star Shohei Ohtani would miss at least three weeks with a UCL sprain.

This is bad, not just for Ohtani and the Angels, but for baseball fans everywhere who have enjoyed and marveled at the historic nature of Ohtani's rookie season. Part of that marvel involved the exciting thought of Ohtani doing his thing before a national audience in the All-Star Game next month in Washington.

And while the Angels say they'll re-evaluate their star pitcher/sluggger in three weeks, one would have to assume that even in a best-case scenario Ohtani is unlikely to take part in All-Star activities, now just five weeks away. Although the Angels have not mentioned his All-Star status, and though it's possible he could recover in time, it doesn't seem like something Ohtani or the Angels would want to risk for an exhibition game. (And, yes, he was all but certain to be on the team.)

Although that's understandable and probably necessary from a health and team perspective, it's still a bummer for the greater baseball world.

Make no mistake: Ohtani is a special player, the likes of which we've not seen in more than a century. He's a legitimate two-way superstar with the ability to make hitters look foolish with 100 mph fastballs and nasty breaking pitches, while also driving balls deep into the seats as a designated hitter. As I've written before, he's the real deal, and what he's done so far in 2018 is truly historic and potentially sport-changing.

On the mound, Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and 61 strikeouts in 49.1 innings. With the bat, he's slashing .289/.372/.535 with six homers and an OPS of .907. Add it all together and he's been worth 2.0 WAR so far, according to the Baseball Reference formula. What he's been doing is pretty much unprecedented in modern baseball. Once the shiny newness wore off of Ohtani around late April, a lot of fans stopped paying attention. But Ohtani just kept doing his thing, albeit mostly on the West Coast, which meant hundreds of thousands — if not millions — of East Coast and Midwest fans didn't get to watch, either because of a clash with sleep schedules or a general lack of awareness.

The All-Star Game would've been a great place to re-ignite Ohtani Mania. There seems to be little doubt that Ohtani would've found a place on the AL roster. It wouldn't have mattered whether it was as a pitcher or as a hitter. Anything that would've let the greater baseball world watch his greatness unfold in prime time would've been great for Ohtani, the Angels and baseball.

Back in April, SN colleague Bill Bender talked to folks in Anaheim about what the future might hold for Ohtani as far as his potential to become a transcendent superstar that captures the attention and awe of the country, perhaps even the entire sports world. The All-Star Game was supposed to be a big part of that, the way it was with another transcendent star, Bo Jackson, in 1989.

"That's the kind of energy it may bring with Shohei," Angels broadcaster Mark Gubicza told SN. "It's already been strong with Shohei, and if he's somehow able to make it to the Midsummer Classic, if that happens, then I'll tell you what — watch out."

Ohtani's UCL diagnosis all but eliminates that possibility, at least this season. But if the evaluation in three weeks is promising, and assuming his recovery and rehab go as planned, Ohtani will be back on the field soon enough. There's no need for the Angels to rush him back, and they won't. They know what they have with Ohtani, the promise he still holds for the team and the sport.

For now, though, the rest of the country likely won't get to see that promise in July at Nationals Park — and that's unfortunate.

Shohei Ohtani injury update: Angels pitcher placed on DL with UCL sprain

By Thomas Lott

Shohei Ohtani will be placed on the disabled list with a grade 2 sprain of his right (pitching) ulnar collateral ligament, the Angels announced Friday.

He underwent a platelet-rich plasma and stem cell injection as a form of treatment Thursday and will be re-evaluated in three weeks, according to the team.

Ohtani, 23, was removed from his most recent mound start with what manager Mike Scioscia described afterward as a blister problem, however Friday's news appears far worse for the double-threat rookie sensation.

Ohtani has had UCL issues for the better part of the last two years. He was discovered to have the problem when he signed with the Angels but missed a good portion of his final season in Japan with an elbow problem.

The injury not only removes him from the Angels rotation, but also takes his bat out of the Angels lineup as a DH. He is hitting .289/.372/.535 with six homers and 20 RBIs.

FROM SB NATION**Shohei Ohtani will go on the DL with a UCL sprain**

He'll be reevaluated in three weeks.

By Whitney McIntosh

Shohei Ohtani — light of our lives, two-way player of our dreams, the complete baseball entertainment set in one easy-to-consume package — is going on the disabled list. And not a quick “just in case” trip either, it seems. This is a more worrisome problem.

This afternoon, apparently timed perfectly to ruin everyone’s Friday and weekend, the Angels confirmed Ohtani will be spending time on the DL due to a Grade 2 UCL sprain.

This injury is what Ohtani was dealing with during the offseason as well, although at that point it was only a Grade 1 strain. The news of that came out after he had signed with the Angels but they knew of the injury before he joined the organization (as did every team pursuing him).

Right now there’s no news of him needing to undergo a procedure beyond what he’s already done, a Platelet-Rich Plasma Injection with some stem cells thrown in on the side. Basically the Five Guys combo order of baseball player medical care.

Both are procedures that Ohtani has done before, so with any luck a combination of that and rest will be enough to save him from a lengthy stay on the disabled list or (god forbid) Tommy John Surgery.

Three weeks is a long time to wait for Ohtani to be re-evaluated, especially with the Mariners looking like they do in the AL West while the Angels try to fight them and the Astros off, but if it’s only a few weeks before he can get back on the mound well-rested and sharp then that’s not too bad a price to pay.

Let’s just hope time and rest are all that are needed.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT**Shohei Ohtani to Miss at Least 3 Weeks with UCL Injury and Blister**

By Kyle Newport

Los Angeles Angels star Shohei Ohtani left Wednesday's game against the Kansas City Royals with a blister on his right middle finger, but it turns out he has another injury that will force him to miss time.

The Angels announced Friday the right-hander has been placed on the 10-day disabled list with a Grade 2 sprain of the UCL. Ohtani received platelet-rich plasma and stem-cell injections Thursday and will be re-evaluated in three weeks.

If that treatment doesn't work, Tommy John surgery "could be in Ohtani's future," according to Robert Murray of FRS Baseball.

As impressive as he has been when healthy, Ohtani has dealt with some injuries this season. He first experienced the blister issue in April and also suffered a mild left ankle sprain that month. None of the injuries had forced him to the disabled list yet, though.

As well, Yahoo Sports' Jeff Passan reported shortly after Ohtani signed with the Angels in December that the two-way phenom had a first-degree sprain of the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow.

After a rough spring training that led to speculation he would start the season in the minors, Ohtani has proved he can make an impact with both his arm and his bat in the majors.

As a pitcher, Ohtani has opened the season at 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA, 1.14 WHIP and 61 strikeouts in 49.1 innings. He's also hit .289 with six homers and 20 RBI.

The offense already has had to play without Ohtani in the lineup several times a week, and it has dealt with injuries to Mike Trout, Albert Pujols and Justin Upton.

Being a two-way player put Ohtani at twice the risk for injury, but with his talent, signing him was worth the risk to the Angels. However, they once again find themselves having to be cautious with their rookie star.