



# ***Press Clips***

**(June 8, 2018)**

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**FROM THE OC REGISTER****Angels starters flourishing with six-man rotation**

By Jeff Fletcher

ANAHEIM — So far, the Angels' rotation experiment seems to be working.

General Manager Billy Eppler's idea of using a six-man rotation – more accurately, of giving pitchers an extra day of rest whenever possible – has not only received the stamp of approval from the pitchers, but the results have been undeniable.

With the season just past its one-third point, the Angels' rotation ERA (3.58) ranks third in the league, behind only the Houston Astros (2.83) and Cleveland Indians (3.54). Since May 1, the Angels starters have a 2.61 ERA, which is best in the league.

"I don't think you could look at this last month and think we could pitch any better from the starting rotation," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Some of these guys are getting a little more rest. At times they are going on normal rest. I think it's going to be a bigger plus as we move deeper into the season."

The Angels are the only team in the majors with five starters who have made seven starts with an ERA of 3.50 or better.

Shohei Ohtani (3.10), Andrew Heaney (3.12), Garrett Richards (3.25) and Tyler Skaggs (3.27) are fixtures, with 21-year-old rookie Jaime Barría (2.48) flourishing in his role shuttling between Triple-A and the majors. Nick Tropeano (4.35) has the highest ERA, but the Angels have still won five of his nine starts.

Skaggs, who leads the Angels with 66 innings, said he's a fan of the six-day rotation: "It's nice to get an extra day in between to recover. I see a lot of pluses and not many minuses."

Added Richards: "The guys seem to like it."

The point of the switch, as Eppler described it over the winter, was really to keep the pitchers healthy. It didn't work for JC Ramírez or Matt Shoemaker, but their injuries both lingered from last year.

Although the addition of Ohtani was the impetus for the Angels to make the change, Ohtani has actually been on a schedule independent of the other starters. Ohtani has been working on at least six days' rest, just like he did in Japan.

For the other starters, the Angels have set five days' rest to be the default, rather than the traditional four. Often they've accomplished this simply by using the off days in the schedule as the extra day, which is something most teams do.

When the schedule doesn't provide an off day, they have used Barría as their sixth starter. He's gone back to Triple-A immediately after a start four times, and the first three he returned after exactly 10 days, the minimum time a player can be down when he's optioned. Barría is likely to be back again to

start Tuesday in Seattle, after another 10-day trip to Triple-A. Another time the Angels put Tropeano on the disabled list and then returned him to the rotation after the minimum 10 days.

The shuffling has allowed the Angels to keep only five starters on the roster for most of the season, which is more manageable in terms of the bullpen and bench composition.

Although there has been some juggling, the pitchers say they usually know immediately after one start when they'll make their next start, so they can plan accordingly. When they have five days between starts, the extra day provides either extra rest or, in some cases, extra work.

In a traditional four days of rest between starts, pitchers throw their bullpen on the second or third day, depending on their preference. Either way, that means there's only a one-day gap between the bullpen and a game. With five days' rest, the bullpen is normally on the third day, so there are two days on both sides.

"I feel extremely fresh for my bullpen, which is nice," Skaggs said. "You can get a lot of work into it. You don't want to overdo it, but it's been great so far."

Tropeano said if there's something you need to work on, the extra day of rest allows that. For example, after giving up five runs in his last start, Tropeano said he planned to do more work on his splitter in his next bullpen.

"You can get a little more intent into it," he said. "On a five-day rotation, you don't have that luxury. You want to stay with your routine. You throw 25-30 pitches. Now you can go maybe 35 or 40-plus with the six-day."

Richards said his bullpens are "definitely more crispy" with the extra day. Pitching coach Charlie Nagy said he and Richards "get after it" in their bullpens.

It's worth noting Richards followed his two worst starts of the year with his two best starts, each time with five days' rest. Only once all season have the Angels had a starter allow four or more runs in back-to-back starts.

Could it be because they're better able to fix what's wrong with the extra day in between?

"I like that theory," Nagy said with a smile. "I can't confirm or deny it."

Richards said it's more that the pitchers are good at diagnosing and fixing their problems. They've also been together long enough to help each other.

Heaney's theory is the success of the rotation isn't about the schedule. It's about the pitchers actually ... pitching.

"For me, the difference is ... I don't even want to say it," Heaney said. "Knock on wood, we've all been healthy."

You can't compare last year's 4.38 rotation ERA with a five-man rotation to this year's performance with a six-man rotation because they are different pitchers. Ricky Nolasco led the Angels in starts last year. So far this year, the Angels' most talented starters have been able to stay in the rotation. Whether that's mostly, partly or slightly attributable to the extra day of rest is impossible to know.

"Maybe we're on to something," Heaney said. "Revolutionizing the game."

#### **UP NEXT**

Angels (Garrett Richards, 4-4, 3.25) at Twins (Lance Lynn, 4-4, 5.46), Friday, 5 p.m., Fox Sports West, KLAA (830 AM)

### **FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**

## **Albert Pujols is an RBI away from tying a man he honored, Stan Musial**

By Mike DiGiovanna

Albert Pujols is usually reluctant to discuss the significant milestones of his career, such as the 600<sup>th</sup> homer he hit last season or the 3,000<sup>th</sup> hit he collected in early May, until he reaches them.

But the Angels slugger and future Hall of Famer was happy to make an exception this week when asked if he knew who he was about to catch and pass for seventh place on baseball's all-time runs batted in list.

"Yes," Pujols said, a huge grin erasing the game face he often wears, even three hours before first pitch. "Stan the Man."

Pujols has 1,950 RBIs entering Friday night's game at Minnesota. The next run he drives in will tie him with Stan Musial, a Hall of Famer and former St. Louis Cardinals great who hit .331 with 475 homers and 1,951 RBIs during a 22-year career with the same organization that developed Pujols.

Pujols, 38, joined Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Alex Rodriguez as the only members of baseball's exclusive 600-homer, 3,000-hit club last month, and the three-time National League most valuable player and two-time World Series champion has already etched his name among the game's immortals.

But there is something more personal, more meaningful, about passing Musial, a man Pujols developed a close relationship with despite their 60-year age difference while Pujols played for the Cardinals from 2001 to 2011.

"It's pretty special, man," Pujols said. "He was a guy I had a lot of respect for. To me, it wasn't just the man he was on the field and the things he accomplished. It was the man he was off the field, the things he did for this country. It puts a smile on my face every time I think about him or someone mentions his name."

Musial was known for his grace and sportsmanship — he was never ejected by an umpire — and he had a special bond with Cardinals fans during a career that spanned from 1941 to 1963. He sat out the 1945 season while serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Musial remained closely connected to the team until his death in 2013 at age 92. In 2011, President Obama awarded Musial the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Every time Musial came to the park, Pujols made a point of speaking to him, and not just about hitting.

"What I mostly took away from him was how he cared about people, how humble he was," Pujols said. "We all hang up this jersey one day, but at the end of the day, bro, those are the memories that you take, and nobody can take them away from you. That's something I'll cherish forever."

Pujols developed such a reverence for Musial that he felt uncomfortable early in his career when St. Louis writers started calling him "El Hombre."

When Pujols signed a 10-year, \$240-million deal with the Angels before the 2012 season, the team launched a billboard campaign featuring Pujols as "El Hombre." Pujols asked the Angels to take them down.

"You had to know and respect his place in history," Pujols said of Musial. "I wasn't feeling comfortable because there was somebody I respect who had already earned that name. Even though his was in English and mine was in Spanish, it has the same meaning. For me, it was somebody I honored."

Like Musial, who batted .283 with an .835 on-base-plus-slugging percentage and averaged 15 homers and 63 RBIs over his final five seasons, Pujols is no longer the feared slugger he was in his prime.

He's batting .252 with a .691 OPS, eight homers and 32 RBIs in 56 games, a slight improvement over his .241 average and .672 OPS in 2017.

But Pujols, thanks to better health and a winter conditioning program that helped him lose 15-20 pounds, has been able to start 35 games at first base after foot injuries relegated him to 34 games in the field in the last two years.

That has freed up the DH spot for two-way star Shohei Ohtani to bat four or five times a week.

"I'm holding up, man I feel pretty good," said Pujols, who sat out two games against the Kansas City Royals this week because of a sore left knee but is expected to return Friday. "It was like riding a bike. You feel uncomfortable in spring training, but then you're excited to get that first ground ball hit to you. After that, I was fine."

Pujols, a two-time Gold Glove Award winner in St. Louis, has been adequate, if not spectacular, on defense.

According to Fangraphs, he ranks 14<sup>th</sup> among 26 first basemen who have played at least 250 innings with a minus-3.4 defensive rating, which measures a player's defensive value relative to league average. No first baseman has a positive rating.

“He’s been great,” manager Mike Scioscia said. “We’ve been able to tap into [his defense] a lot this year, and we’ll continue to do that. It allows us to get a little different dimension when we get Shohei’s bat in there.”

It also gives Pujols a lot less time to dwell on his at-bats, which is good in those games when he fails to get a hit or RBI.

“When you’re playing defense, you forget about hitting,” Pujols said. “But when you’re the DH, and you only hit once every three innings, you’re constantly going into the video room to look at-bats, and you watch too much.

“When I’m in the field, I feel like I’m in the game and focused. I take a lot of pride in that and feel like I’m a pretty good first baseman. Maybe I don’t have the range I had when I was 25 or 30, but you don’t have to have that. You can have the experience to make pretty much every play you can.”

**FROM ANGELS.COM**

## **Inbox: Should Angels trade for proven closer?**

By Maria Guardado

**Any chance that the Angels will try to acquire a closer or are they "all in" on Blake Parker?**

-- @kevin3841

Parker has done an impressive job of turning it around after a rough start to the season, but I think the Angels will ultimately explore the trade market for relief help this summer. The Halos' bullpen has logged a solid 3.70 ERA this season, but its 12 blown saves are tied for the most in the Majors. Losing **Keynan Middleton** and **Blake Wood** to season-ending Tommy John surgeries were significant blows, so I think it would make sense for the Angels to fortify their back-end corps.

Several "established closers" are **expected to be made available** on the trade market, including the Royals' **Kelvin Herrera**, the Orioles' **Zach Britton** and the Padres' **Brad Hand**, so they could be potential targets if the Angels are looking to upgrade.

**Any chance we get a shot to trade for Blake Snell?**

-- @cura\_MLB

The Rays were already involved in the first major trade of the year, as they sent closer **Alex Colome** and outfielder **Denard Span** to the Mariners for two pitching prospects last month, but I think it would take a massive haul for Tampa Bay to even consider parting with the 25-year-old Snell, who is enjoying a breakout season and is under control through the 2022 season. I don't see the Halos dipping into their farm system to that degree, especially since their rotation has been one of their strengths this season. Since May 1, Angels starters have logged a 2.61 ERA, the lowest mark in the American League.

Snell is an enticing talent, but the Angels already have an impressive stable of young, controllable arms in **Andrew Heaney, Tyler Skaggs, Shohei Ohtani, Jaime Barria** and **Nick Tropeano**, all of whom are 27 and under and could be fixtures in Anaheim for the near future.

**I know why the Angels are calling up and then sending down Barria, is there a cap on how many times they can do that throughout the year?**

-- @hoekedonphoto

Players on a 40-man roster are given three Minor League options, and a player loses an option when he is sent to the Minors for a span of more than 20 days. An option applies to an entire season, so Barria can be sent to the Minors and recalled to the Majors any number of times over the course of a season while only losing one option.

The Angels have optioned Barria four times this season, though he's often returned to pitch in the Majors after spending the minimum 10 days at Triple-A Salt Lake. During those stretches, Barria will usually make an abbreviated Minor League appearance to keep himself sharp. He allowed one run over three innings for Salt Lake on Thursday and will be eligible to rejoin the Angels on Tuesday in Seattle.

**How long will it take for Ohtani to get better against left-handed pitchers? What does he have to do to get better?**

-- @MerriCao

Ohtani has posted a 1.057 OPS against right-handers and a .451 OPS against left-handers this year, but I don't think he nor the Angels are too concerned about those splits. Ohtani's numbers are probably skewed by a small sample size, as only 33 of his 129 plate appearances this season have come against lefties.

Ohtani posted even splits in Japan, so he has a track record of hitting lefties well. His numbers could start to even out in time, as he familiarizes himself with the pitchers around the league and continues to adjust to the higher level of competition.

## FROM THE ATHLETIC

### **The Athletic Q&A: Mike Trout on being great, being humble, chasing Dad, and driving a (really nice) truck**

By Steve Dilbeck

Let's start with this: The Angels' Mike Trout is the greatest player in baseball. No debate, no "in the conversation" qualifiers. Flat out the best and has been since his rookie season in 2012.

Trout finished first or second in the American League MVP voting in his first five full seasons, winning twice. He is currently second in MLB in home runs (19), leads in on-base percentage (.444) and is near



the top of most every offensive category. His current wins-above-replacement rating (*Baseball Reference*) of 14.2 would be the greatest single season in history. As in *ever*.

The boy from Millville, N.J. — still only 26 — enjoyed a busy offseason. He married his high school sweetheart, Jessica Cox, and cheered his Philadelphia Eagles to victory in the Super Bowl. He entered 2018 as baseball's highest-paid player (\$33.25 million).

And he's gone right back to work. Reams have been written about baseball's fresh-faced superstar, though they seldom include many comments from the friendly but quote-reticent Trout.

To go directly to the source, I sat down with Trout on Tuesday in an interview room at Angel Stadium for a wide-ranging Q&A session.

**So Millville, what's the most exciting thing to do there on a Saturday night?**

"For me, I just like to have people over at my house. I have a little game room in the basement. Relax, chill. There are good restaurants. Go see a movie. Nothing too crazy."

**Sounds scintillating. Saw that MLB did a documentary on you and now ESPN is going to come out with one. What super-secret Trout reveals will come out in the ESPN treatment?**

"There's not a whole lot more about me. I don't think there are any secrets about me."

**I'll look forward to it. You've been getting some decent attention over your interest in meteorology. In another life if you had my athletic ability but dashing good looks, could you actually be a weatherman?**

"I could. I really enjoy weather. In the offseason I track storms. Just really enjoy predicting weather. You could ask my wife, ask my dad, ask my family. I'm really into detail with it. The hype building up to a storm just interests me."

**OK, give me your finest TV weather report.**

"You know, a snowstorm, there are a thousand models. There are three regular, top models you can use. The European model, the GSF model ..."

**You have to pick one. The camera's rolling.**

"It's tough. It's tough to predict. You can have the greatest technology and still get it wrong. That's why I like the challenge."

**I just turned the channel. You also played basketball in high school. Do you remember the first time you dunked?**

"I think it was at a high school practice. I was awfully excited."

**Most people can't dunk. What did it feel like?**

“It felt great. When you go on a basketball court, you want to dunk. It all started when I was trying to grab rim. Obviously I got rejected a few times before I dunked, but it was cool.”

**Those hops must have come in handy when you made the famous 2012 flying catch in Baltimore.**

“At that time the warning track was kind of like rubbery. You could get a little spring to it, so that helped me.”

**You have that little play hoop in the clubhouse that you and some teammates fool around with. Ian Kinsler looks pretty deadly. Who’s the better shooter?**

“Kinsler is because he has kids and is always shooting. Albert (Pujols) is good too. He has kids as well. I’m sure he’s shot on that hoop a few times before me.”

**You like to hunt when you go back home. What do you hunt?**

“Deer hunting, mainly, with a bow. I like bird hunting.”

**You’re like Kirk Gibson, climbing in a tree, waiting for deer?**

“Yeah, I like to sit in a tree and enjoy Mother Nature and the wildlife.”

**Your father, Jeff, also played baseball at Millville High School, and when he was a 22-year-old senior at the University of Delaware he hit .519. When you were 22 you hit a career-low .287. Does he ever tell you he’s the best hitter in the family?**

“It was pretty cool coming up in high school and trying to break his records. Obviously, he hit extremely high in college. I didn’t go to college. Every once in a while we’re outside playing Wiffle Ball with my nephew, and he’ll throw a shout-out there, ‘I hit .500 in college!’ He’s always texting me and supporting me. He’s obviously one of my role models growing up. I idolize him.”

**You waited in the studio for the first televised MLB draft. Seventeen teams passed on you, several more than once before the Angels took you at No. 25. What would you *really* like to say to those teams now?**

“Obviously, throughout my childhood, I was very confident in my ability. Being on the East Coast, it’s tough getting seen, so at the time I was anxious and just really happy I got picked. You go to the draft, you know you’re going to be in the first three rounds, you just hope you’ll be drafted on that first day. I look back and I’m just happy the Angels drafted me. I can’t ask for a better organization so far, from top to bottom. From Arte (Moreno, owner) to the coaches to my teammates. The way it’s been so far has just been great.”

**You’re from New Jersey, where the NFL’s Jets and Giants play. You’re a renowned Eagles fan. No state pride?**

“We’re like 20 minutes from Philly and two hours from the other stadium. My dad and family were all Philly fans growing up, and I just always rooted for Philly.”

**You're portrayed as the "Hero of Millville" a lot. What about the "Thief of Millville"?**

"The thief?"

**Yeah, you stole the queen of Millville, married her and took her away to Southern California.**

"It's life before baseball. Meeting her was awesome. Throughout my high school career, she was always there. She made sacrifices. There were some tough times. A lot of times in the minors, it was a long-distance relationship and we wouldn't see it each other for two, three months. It was tough on us. But we supported each other. She supported me. I think she keeps me humble. She picks me up when I'm struggling. It's great coming home. It doesn't matter if I go 4 for 4 or 0 for 4, I'm always coming home to a happy wife and my dog. It's bigger than baseball. The support she gives me, I couldn't thank her enough."

**Did you buy your parents a home?**

"Yeah, they built a house and I helped them."

**Can I adopt you?**

(Just laughs.)

**Ever feel guilty that you've eclipsed Tim Salmon as the big Fish in the Angels' history?**

"Guilty? I've got to know Fish really well in my years here. What a great guy. He's always coaching Little League teams. I wouldn't say I feel guilty, it just happened to be fish last names."

**When you're barely 21, you're on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and it says: "The Supernatural." Are you worried you peaked early?**

"For me, when I step on the field, I don't think about anything but winning and competing. I don't read too much into things. I think if you read too much into things, you start thinking about them too much and doing too little. I go out there and don't worry about what's going on in social media or anything. Once that game starts, I just get locked in."

**So teammate Garrett Richards and some of the guys call you the Golden Boy. Is that because you're stupid rich?**

"Nah, it's because they say if I challenge them in anything, I always win. They don't make bets with me anymore. It's just funny they say that."

**What's the most extravagant thing you've ever bought yourself?**

"I'm not really a big spender. My wife keeps me grounded."

**You have a mansion out here on the beach. You have like a maid's quarters and a butler's quarters and a pool boy's quarters?**

“Nah, we’re leasing.”

**You seem like you should drive a truck. Do you actually drive a Lamborghini?**

“I do drive a truck. I have Ford Raptor. It’s a pretty quick truck.”

**Did you at least trick it out?**

“It’s souped-up a little bit. It’s nice.”

**You’re all playful with teammates in the clubhouse, on the field and the dugout. But with the media you’re pretty straightforward. Are you intentionally bland so we won’t bother you with questions?**

“Nah, I’m just a simple guy. I keep it simple. Even with baseball, I try to keep it simple. When I start putting things in my head and thinking about stuff too much, it gets out of control. The more simple I can keep it. You can ask the hitting coaches: I keep everything simple and try not to think too much. That’s just how I am.”

**Shifting tone a tad, what do you think drives you to be the greatest?**

“I love to compete. The main goal, the all-time goal, is to win a championship, to win a World Series. If I can go out there and play my hardest and try to be the best player on the field every day and help my team win, at the end of the day, we’ll give it a shot to win a championship.”

**What’s the greatest thing that ever happened to you on a baseball field?**

“I think when we got to the playoffs in ’14. Your goal before winning the championships is to get to the playoffs. Clinching and winning the division meant a lot to me, meant a lot to the team. Obviously, the playoffs didn’t go the way we wanted (the Angels were swept by Royals), but we have a good team this year, so we just have to keep it going.”

**Some people think playoff success is the one thing missing from your résumé. Do you feel that way?**

“Yeah, when you ask about a player you want to see the playoffs, the big stage. You want to get to the championship.”

**Is it important to you to go down in history as one of the greatest players of all time?**

“Yeah, I come to the ballpark, and once I step on the field, I want to be the best player on that field. I’ve been saying that since Day One since I was a kid at anything I did. It didn’t have to be baseball. I just wanted to be the best at it. I guess it’s my competitiveness. I always want to win.”

**Thanks. Last chance at adoption.**

## Corcoran: Impressive milestones ahead for Bartolo Colon, CC Sabathia, Mike Trout and others

By Cliff Corcoran

Bartolo Colon collected the 243rd win of his career Wednesday night picking up the victory as the Rangers beat the A's. That win tied him with Hall of Famer Juan Marichal for the most wins by a pitcher born in the Dominican Republic.

That's no small thing. Marichal was just the second Dominican-born pitcher in major-league history and debuted just 16 days after the first, Rudy Hernández of the Washington Senators. Hernández, who pitched exclusively in relief in his two major-league seasons, debuted on July 3, 1960. His first win came on July 9, 1960. By the time Hernández won his second game, on July 29, Marichal, who debuted on July 19 with a one-hit shutout of the Phillies, was 3-0, all of them complete games, the last spanning 10 innings.

The record Colon tied is one that Marichal has held since his second major-league game, on July 23, 1960, a span of nearly 58 years. The only other Dominican pitcher to come within 90 wins of Marichal, since his retirement, is fellow Hall of Famer Pedro Martínez, who fell 24 wins shy with 219.

Colon will break Marichal's record with his next win, but that may not be the last milestone he reaches in his 21st major league-season. Nor will it necessarily be the most impressive.

With three more wins, Colon will pass Dennis Martínez as the winningest Latin American pitcher in major-league history. It took the Nicaraguan Martínez 23 seasons to eclipse Marichal, doing so in 1998 at age 44 as a member of the Atlanta Braves. He tied Marichal with a shutout of the Brewers, then slipped past him with a pair of relief wins.

If Colon can manage to win seven more games this year, he will reach 250 career wins, making him the first pitcher to reach that total since Andy Pettitte in 2013. Seven more wins will give him 10 on the season, a total he reached every year from 2012 to 2016.

Colon is the active leader in wins, but he is not the only pitcher with an outside shot at reaching 250 this season. His former Indians and Yankees rotation-mate, CC Sabathia, is just 10 wins shy of 250, and while Sabathia is on pace to win only five or six more games this year, given the quality of the Yankees' lineup and bullpen it's not out of the question that he could pick up those 10 wins.

Colon and Sabathia are similarly on the verge of significant strikeout milestones. Colon needs just one more punchout to reach 2,500 for his career, so that's a lock. Sabathia, however, needs 110 to reach a far more significant number: 3,000. Given that Sabathia struck out only 120 men last year and is on pace for a mere 123 this year (44 of which he already has in the books), he likely won't get there in 2018. But if he returns next season, Sabathia should get to 3,000 easily. Why is that significant? Because the only pitchers with 3,000 career strikeouts who aren't in the Hall of Fame are Roger Clemens and Curt Schilling, both of whom had Hall-worthy careers.

Another major pitching milestone in the offing this season, one that is also a near lock, is Justin Verlander's 200th win. Verlander, who recorded his 2,500th strikeout in May, will enter his Friday night

start against Colon's Rangers with 195 wins. When Verlander reaches 200, he'll join Colon and Sabathia as the only active pitchers to have reached that threshold. Next on the active wins list is Zack Greinke, who needs 24 more to reach 200.

Meanwhile, diminished though he may be, Félix Hernández is just 96 strikeouts away from 2,500 and should get there this season if he stays healthy and in the Mariners rotation, though both are significant ifs at this point.

In the bullpen, Boston's Craig Kimbrel is on pace to save 50 games this season. If he does, he'll match Rollie Fingers' career total of 341. That carries its own significance, at least for older fans, as Fingers was the career saves leader from 1980 until 1992. With the advent of the one-inning closer, Fingers has fallen to 13th on the all-time list, but given that Kimbrel just turned 30 last week, that's still a milestone worth acknowledging.

At the plate, the most compelling milestone chase is the slow-motion race to 500 homers between Miguel Cabrera and Adrián Beltré. Neither will get there this year, as they need 35 and 36, respectively, and there's a chance that the 39-year-old Beltré might retire before ever hitting his 500th, but both *could* get there next year. If they do, Beltré would be just the seventh player with 3,000 hits and 500 homers, and just the second from that group with at least five Gold Gloves, joining Willie Mays.

One homer milestone likely to happen *this* year is Giancarlo Stanton's 300th of his career. Stanton, who already has 14 on the season, needs just 19 more to reach that mark. If he does, he'll be just the 10th player in major-league history to reach 300 home runs by the end of his age-28 season, joining Jimmie Foxx, Mel Ott, Mickey Mantle, Eddie Mathews, Juan González, Ken Griffey Jr., Álex Rodríguez, Andruw Jones, and Albert Pujols. Of those nine, only González and Jones, both of whom finished with 434 homers, failed to reach 500 home runs.

Mike Trout is likely to join that list by 2020, but for 2018, the Mike Trout career milestone to watch — beyond his absurd ascent up the career wins-above-replacement list (he is on pace to finish the season with a career bWAR better than Ernie Banks') — is his stolen-base total. Trout has an outside shot to get the 22 more steals he needs this season to reach 200 for his career. If he does, he'll become the first player in major-league history with both 200 home runs and 200 stolen bases by the end of his age-26 season.

Meanwhile, Trout remains on pace to equal or surpass the single-season record for bWAR by a position player. By Baseball Reference's calculations, Babe Ruth was worth 14.1 wins above replacement in 1923, when he hit .293/.545/.764 (239 OPS+) in 152 games and had his best season in the field, per total zone rating. Entering Friday's action, Trout is on pace for 14.14 bWAR this season.

Incidentally, the pitcher Mike Trout has had the most success against in his career, minimum 20 plate appearances, is none other than Bartolo Colon. Trout is 11 for 20 (.550) career against Colon with a double and three home runs and has gone 2 for 3 with a double against Colon this year. Given that the Angels and Rangers have four series remaining this season, here's hoping we get to see that matchup several more times.

**FROM MLB.COM**

## Ohtani to miss a start for blister; DL is possible

By Matt Kelly

Angels two-way phenom **Shohei Ohtani** will miss his next scheduled start on the mound and could soon be headed to the disabled list due to a resurfaced blister on his right middle finger, MLB.com's Jon Paul Morosi reported Friday. The club has not confirmed the report.

The Angels have a pair of off-days on their schedule over the next two weeks, which could increase the likelihood of Ohtani landing on the DL.

Shohei Ohtani is expected to miss at least one start due to a blister on his pitching hand, source says. A trip to the disabled list is possible. @MLBNetwork @MLB

The righty was forced to exit four innings into his Wednesday start against the Royals after a blister that first troubled him during his April 17 start against the Red Sox flared up again. Ohtani allowed a run on four hits and three walks to Kansas City before heading to the dugout. He was scheduled to pitch next against the first-place Mariners on Wednesday in Seattle.

"You could see the beginnings of [a blister]," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Wednesday, "and we obviously didn't want him to get past that."

The 23-year-old ranks among MLB's biggest storylines, as he's excelled both on the mound and at the plate like few have ever done before. Ohtani is 4-1 with a 3.10 ERA and has held opponents to a .202 batting average in nine starts as a pitcher, while also hitting .289 with six home runs and a .907 OPS over 129 plate appearances as a designated hitter or pinch-hitter. He is the first player to regularly appear as both a pitcher and hitter full-time since Babe Ruth a century ago.

**FROM MiLB.COM**

## Toolshed makes Triple-A ballot picks

*Endorsing All-Star options to head to Columbus on July 11*

By Sam Dykstra

MiLB.com doesn't have an editorial page. There's no spot for long-winded pieces debating the major stories of the day around the country and the globe. There are no endorsements to make in key local and national races.

That is, until now.

The **Triple-A All-Star Game ballot** is live, and fans can vote to send their favorite International and Pacific Coast League players to Columbus for the Minor League version of the midsummer classic on July 11. Balloting closes in two weeks, so while there's still time this week's edition of the Friday Toolshed lays out the best options in each of the major IL and PCL categories. (Note: All statistics are through Thursday afternoon.)

### First base

**International: Joey Meneses, Lehigh Valley** -- An eight-year Minor League veteran who hadn't cracked Triple-A until this season, Meneses leads ballot-eligible IL first basemen with a .293 average, .529 slugging percentage and .875 OPS. His 10 homers are tied for second in the league with fellow first baseman **Carlos Franco** (Gwinnett). It's not a particularly deep group here, but Meneses' trip to Columbus would be both well-earned and a nice story.

**Pacific Coast: Jose Miguel Fernandez, Salt Lake** -- Fernandez has gotten almost equal time at first, second and third, but he's on the ballot as a first baseman, so he gets the nod here. He ranks fifth in the PCL with a .345 average, and his .973 OPS and 155 wRC+ both lead the PCL at the position. He's also one of five qualified batters with more walks than strikeouts. Round Rock's **Tommy Joseph** (13) and El Paso's **Brett Nicholas** (12) may have the homers but lack the overall resume of Fernandez. Tacoma's **Daniel Vogelbach** boasts a fun slash line at .304/.444/.652 but has 84 fewer PCL plate appearances this season. No need to overthink this.

### Second base

**International: Kean Wong, Durham** -- The younger brother of Cardinals second baseman **Kolten Wong** has been solid in his second season with the Bulls. He's the only IL second baseman on the ballot with an average above .300 (.304), and his 136 wRC+ is also highest in the group. His .360 OBP, .478 slugging percentage and five homers in 41 games might not jump off the page, but among this group, the 23-year-old is the standout ahead of **Irving Falu** and **Kevin Kramer**.

**Pacific Coast: Tony Kemp, Fresno** -- This comes down to personal preference. Iowa's **David Bote** has the best power among the group with eight homers, a .497 slugging percentage and .846 OPS. But that's about the only argument over Kemp, who's proven to be a better hitter (.335 average vs. .275), reaches base at a better rate (.407 OBP vs. .349), steals more bases (13 vs. two) and strikes out significantly less (8.2 percent K rate vs. 22.3 percent). So what if Kemp is up in the Majors as an Astros outfielder? He's on the ballot as a PCL second baseman and has enough at-bats to qualify in the major categories.

### Shortstop

**International: Ronny Rodriguez, Toledo** -- Most recall Rodriguez as the guy who **hit for the cycle** for the Mud Hens on May 30, then was called up to the Majors for the first time the next day. He hasn't been back in the IL since, but his numbers are good enough to warrant votes here. Despite being away for a week, he ranks second in the IL with 107 total bases and is tied for third with 63 hits and 35 RBIs in 48 games. His .540 slugging percentage is alone in third place, while his .882 OPS is almost 100 points higher than his nearest competition in this group -- **Willy Adames** (.788). Rodriguez was an IL postseason All-Star with Columbus last season, but if he were to be voted in here, it would be the first midseason All-Star honor of his career.



**Pacific Coast: David Fletcher, Salt Lake** -- No one in Minor League Baseball has more doubles or extra-base hits than Fletcher's 24 and 35, respectively. His 132 total bases trail only **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.**'s 136 across all levels. At .963, he's the only qualified PCL shortstop with an OPS above .900. You get the picture. Fletcher might be the easiest pick on the PCL side.

### Third base

**International: Mitch Walding, Lehigh Valley** -- There are a couple of notable prospects on the ballot in this spot in **Nick Senzel** and **Austin Riley**. But this isn't about prospect status or big names. Simple enough, Walding has put up the fifth-highest wRC+ in the IL at 148, thanks to a .271/.379/.484 line. His .857 OPS is the highest among IL third basemen. Flash can be fun, but there isn't a player at the hot corner who can beat Walding's resume this season.

**Pacific Coast: Tyler White, Fresno** -- White began the season by reaching base in 45 straight games and has the numbers to back up that level of consistency. He's hit .330/.440/.549 with 10 homers, 15 doubles and a 31/37 K/BB ratio through 56 contests. His 161 wRC+ ranks fourth in the PCL. As good as those numbers are, there was a time that **J.D. Davis** would have taken this spot over his Grizzlies teammate, thanks to a .415/.473/.654 line and 22 extra-base hits in 33 games. But after two stints with the big club, he has 104 fewer PCL plate appearances than White, and that's enough to take him out of the running, albeit for a good reason.

### Catcher

**International: Danny Jansen, Buffalo** -- There have been few hitters in the IL like Jansen these last two seasons, never mind catchers. The **Blue Jays' No. 6 prospect** ranks among the IL's top five in average (.315), OBP (.422) and OPS (.884) and has an almost even 24/23 K/BB ratio through 42 games. He may not be as good defensively as other backstops on the IL ballot, but he's head and shoulders above the group offensively.

**Pacific Coast: Tom Murphy, Albuquerque** -- In his fourth season with the Isotopes, Murphy boasts an offensive resume that'd be more closely tied to power positions like first base, corner outfield or DH. The 27-year-old is hitting .299/.372/.659 with 14 homers, two triples, 14 doubles and 40 RBIs in 44 games. No catcher on the ballot has more than eight homers, and if there's an inclination that a lot of that has to do with Murphy playing his home games in the hitter's haven of Albuquerque, know that nine of his 14 long balls have come on the road.

### Designated hitter

**International: Chad Huffman, Toledo** -- With only 15 starts in the field through 40 games, Huffman has been a true DH for the Mud Hens, and he's made the most of his ability to focus on the bat alone. He's hit .295/.400/.511 with six homers, one triple and 10 doubles in 2018. His .911 OPS is tops in the IL, as he has just enough plate appearances to qualify. That's good enough to earn the vote here.

**Pacific Coast: Rymer Liriano, Salt Lake** -- Not quite as deep a field here, and that makes some sense; it's tougher to find exclusive DHs in the Minor Leagues. Liriano isn't quite that as he's recorded six outfield assists in 288 innings on the grass. But he's still showing plenty of pop in his first season in the Angels

system with 12 homers, a .550 slugging percentage and .880 OPS through 41 games. That wouldn't get him an outfield spot, but he does fit the "best of the rest" designation that comes with the DH spot.

## Outfield

### **International: Christin Stewart, Toledo; Jacob Wilson, Syracuse; Christopher Bostick, Indianapolis -**

- Stewart has been the IL's best slugger with 13 homers in 56 games; no one else has more than 10. Bostick (.326/.376/.513) and Wilson (.326/.378/.511) have almost identical resumes and both lead the circuit in average, though Bostick has 52 more at-bats.

**Pacific Coast: Jabari Blash, Salt Lake; Mike Tauchman, Albuquerque; Franmil Reyes, El Paso --** As the league leader with 16 homers, a .741 slugging percentage and 1.164 OPS, Bash is the early leader for PCL MVP. Tauchman was running away with the batting title with a .385 average before moving up to the Rockies on Tuesday. Reyes made a lot of noise early with 14 homers and a .346/.442/.738 line in 36 games. Those 14 dingers are still tied for second in the PCL, despite the fact he was called up on May 14. His might feel like a token vote, but without a clear option for the third spot, it's hard to ignore his utter dominance.

## Starting pitchers

**International: Enyel De Los Santos, Lehigh Valley; Jalen Beeks, Pawtucket --** De Los Santos can make the case as the IL's best first-half pitcher with a league-best 1.63 ERA next to his 1.01 WHIP and 69 strikeouts over 66 1/3 innings. Beeks, who made his Major League debut Thursday night, leads all Triple-A starters with a 35.4 percent strikeout rate via 80 K's in 56 1/3 innings. He's also posted a 2.56 ERA and 0.98 WHIP in 10 Pawtucket starts. Columbus right-hander **Adam Plutko** (1.83 ERA, 0.68 WHIP) isn't on the ballot but might be worth a write-in vote.

**Pacific Coast: Daniel Poncedeleon, Memphis; Trent Thornton, Fresno --** Poncedeleon could be the feel-good story of the Triple-A All-Star Game. The Cardinals right-hander was struck by a comebacker last season and limited to six starts for Memphis. Now he leads the PCL in ERA (2.41) and strikeouts (71) over 60 innings with the Redbirds. Thornton has done the league's best job at keeping runners off the bases with a league-leading 1.01 WHIP alongside a 3.20 ERA and 53 strikeouts over 50 2/3 innings.

## Relief pitchers

**International: Josh Ravin, Gwinnett; Diego Castillo, Durham --** Ravin is the only IL reliever on the ballot who has yet to allow an earned run. He also has a 0.96 WHIP, .125 opponents' average and 29 strikeouts over 17 2/3 innings. Castillo's numbers (1.03 ERA, 0.84 WHIP, 32 strikeouts in 26 1/3 innings) were eye-popping enough to push him to the Majors on Tuesday, and they're good enough to earn him votes to reach Columbus, should he be back in Triple-A by next month.

**Pacific Coast: Preston Guilmet, Memphis; Bobby Wahl, Nashville --** This isn't a column that will take the easy way out and pick the reliever with the most saves. But Guilmet makes it easy. The Memphis right-hander leads the PCL with 11 saves and posted a 0.93 ERA, 0.48 WHIP and .098 opponents' average with 35 strikeouts in 29 innings. He was called up to St. Louis on Tuesday and designated for assignment two days later. Wahl ranks second among PCL relievers with a 39 percent strikeout rate and owns a 1.80 ERA, 0.80 WHIP and .140 opponents' average in 25 innings.

**FROM ESPN.COM**

## **Buyers, sellers and holders: Where does your team fit?**

By Bradford Doolittle

Amazingly, very little has changed since last month's Stock Watch.

### **Holders**

#### **Los Angeles Angels**

**Current win forecast:** 86.9 (Change from May: -2.8)

**Current playoff probability:** 37.4% (Down 14.2%)

**Current championship probability:** 1.4%

The Angels have baseball's best player, Mike Trout, who is enjoying a season for the ages. They have Shohei Ohtani, baseball's two-way sensation who has been every bit as good as advertised both at the plate and on the mound. They have Andrelton Simmons, one of baseball's top three shortstops. Despite that foundation of talent, L.A. is just a few games over .500 with little better than a one-in-three chance to reach the postseason.

Kole Calhoun, currently on the disabled list, is a highlight reel in right field, but he's also hitting .221/.303/.342 since the beginning of last season. Add Zack Cozart's crash back to earth after his career 2017 season and Albert Pujols' continued struggles, and the Angels badly need help on the corners.

The Angels' top prospects -- Jo Adell, Kevin Maitan, Jahamai Jones, Brandon Marsh -- aren't going to help this season. The Angels were aggressive in the offseason, and now is the time to continue that push, before the Mariners run away with that second wild-card slot in the AL.

**FROM NBC SPORTS**

## **Shohei Ohtani is dealing with another blister**

By Craig Calcaterra

The Angels won last night but starter **Shohei Ohtani** couldn't qualify for the W. He left after four innings due to a blister on his finger.

Ohtani was warming up to start the fifth, actually, but his catcher, **Martin Maldonado**, called for a trainer when he didn't look right with his warmup pitches. Later Mike Scioscia said that noticed that

Ohtani's slider and splitter were becoming less effective as the game went. His night ended having given up one run on four hits and three walks.

This is the second time this season that Ohtani has dealt with blisters.

Ohtani left a game early with a blister on April 17, but made his next start (he's on a once-a-week schedule, so it was seven days later). Scioscia said after the game that this blister "didn't look as bad" as the first one but only time will tell.

## FROM CBS SPORTS

### Angels take injury hit ahead of series with Twins

*Andrelton Simmons won't be available Friday night when the Los Angeles Angels open a three-game weekend series against the Minnesota Twins at Target Field.*

By STATS

Andrelton Simmons won't be available Friday night when the Los Angeles Angels open a three-game weekend series against the Minnesota Twins at Target Field.

The shortstop was placed on the 10-day disabled list after spraining his ankle when he slipped on the dugout steps moments before the Angels took the field against Kansas City on Wednesday afternoon.

He played two innings before having to leave the game and an MRI revealed "some damage," Simmons told reporters after the Angels' 1-0 victory.

He didn't know how long he'd be out but was hopeful he'd miss no more than the required 10 games.

"I'm planning to be back on my feet, moving around, as soon as possible," Simmons said. "But got to play it smart. We'll see. I'm just (mad) I'm going to miss a couple games. That's the only thing that's really bothering me right now."

The 28-year old was batting .330 with an .860 on-base-plus-slugging percentage this season.

"He's an important guy to us," manager Mike Scioscia said Wednesday. "The way it happened is probably tougher to stomach than anything, just coming down the steps. But it happens, and we'll get back out there."

Simmons will remain in Los Angeles during the team's nine-game road swing. Utility man Kaleb Cozart was recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake to fill Simmons' place on the roster while Zack Cozart is expected to see most of the action at shortstop.

"He's an incredible shortstop," Scioscia said of Cozart. "For us to have that luxury to be able to slide him over there is something that a lot of teams wouldn't be able to do."

Albert Pujols should be back in the lineup after missing two games with a sore left knee. Combined with an off-day Thursday, he'll have had three full days of rest.

Scioscia said the injury wasn't serious.

"We're going to manage it," Scioscia said. "I don't think it's anything that we can't take care of with a little bit of rest or there. We want Albert to obviously get his looks in the batter's box. He's starting to really feel good and comfortable swinging the bat."

Right-hander Garrett Richards (4-4, 3.25 ERA) will open the series for Los Angeles. He didn't take a decision in his last outing despite holding the Rangers to an unearned run over a season-high seven innings.

Richards has been doing some good work of late, going 1-3 with a 1.89 ERA over his last six starts.

Minnesota starter Lance Lynn (4-4, 5.46) has shown improvement over his last six outings, posting a 3.34 ERA during that stretch. He limited Cleveland to a run on two hits over six innings in his last start to earn his third consecutive victory.

Lynn has been battling a nagging blister on his pitching hand for much of the season, which has had an impact on his command at times and pushed his traditionally-high fastball usage rate to 78.5 percent on the season.

"When it gets a little bit raw, it's going to affect how he's able to command and spin the ball," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "I don't think there's been a big correlation between his command, which he struggled with early, and the fact he's starting to get better and maybe that thing is healing a little bit."

Lynn gave up four runs on eight hits to the Angles on May 11 and is 0-1 with a 7.59 ERA in two previous starts against Los Angeles.

Richards is 2-1 with a 2.97 ERA in six career outings (five starts) against the Twins, who tagged him for three runs over 5 1/3 innings in a no-decision May 10.

**FROM YAHOO! SPORTS**

## **The surge in pitcher blisters (and home runs) could be due to a small change in the baseballs**

By Liz Roscher

In 2016, two things started happening in baseball: there were more home runs than ever before, and pitchers started getting more blisters. While MLB has no idea what specifically caused the homer surge, Dr. Meredith Wills of The Athletic thinks she's found the cause for both: thicker lacing yarn on the outside of the baseball.

### **Shohei Ohtani is the latest victim of MLB's continuing blister issues**

Not even Shohei Ohtani, a gift to the game of baseball, is immune to this pesky pitcher injury. He left Wednesday night's game between the Los Angeles Angels and the Kansas City Royals in the fourth inning with a blister on his right middle finger, something he's had to do before. It's not known if he'll miss any time or go on the disabled list, but he's just the latest to have this issue. Three other pitchers — Rich Hill, Matt Bowman, and Zac Rosscup — are currently on the disabled list with blisters that prevent them from pitching.

The problem goes back to 2016, which happened to be around the time home runs began surging in baseball. Guys like Hill, Marcus Stroman, and Aaron Sanchez started developing blisters, when they'd never before had those issues. In July 2017, a study from Ben Lindbergh at The Ringer found that pitchers had spent significantly more time out of commission with blisters in 2016 and 2017 than in previous nine years, and that individual blister injuries had also increased sharply.

Hill in particular has been hit hard. 2018 is the third year in a row he's missed time due to blisters, and he's even planning to ask MLB to allow pitchers to wear tape on their hands to cover blisters. That's a lot better than some of his other remedies, which included urinating on his blistered hand. Ew.

### **Thicker lacing yarn could be causing it**

When MLB released its report of the committee tasked with determining the cause of the home run surge, there was good news and bad news. The good news was that they determined what caused it: decreased drag on the baseball, which made it fly farther. But they had no idea *what* had decreased the drag on the baseball.

So Dr. Meredith Wills of The Athletic did an experiment. She took apart 26 balls — 12 from pre-surge 2014, and 14 from 2016-2017 — and tried to keep the materials as intact as possible. She measured a variety of factors between the materials of the two populations of balls, and found one major difference: the thickness of the bright red yarn used to stitch or lace the baseballs together. The yarn used in the 2016-2017 balls was 9 percent thicker than the yarn used in the 2014 balls.

Nine percent might seem small, but for pitchers who touch the ball with their bare hands more than any other kind of player, it could make a huge difference. Dr. Wills said that the thicker lacing yarn creates a "bumpier" seam. That could mean a baseball has different bumps and a textures than a pitcher is used to pitching with, leading to blisters for pitchers who grip the ball in a certain way.

### **The yarn could even be behind the home run surge**

Dr. Wills also believes that the thicker laces could be a cause of the home run surge.

*This introduction of thicker laces could very well be the factor that led to the home run surge. According to the executive summary released by MLB's independent committee, "[M]anufacturing advances that result in a more spherically symmetric ball could have the unintended side effect of reducing the ball's drag." While it is unclear how much spherical symmetry would be gained from a 9.0% increase in lace thickness, it is unreasonable to assume that it would not make some contribution to drag reduction, thereby allowing the ball to carry farther.*

There's only one problem: Rawlings, the company that makes the baseballs, told Nathan that the stitching material wasn't changed. However, if their yarn supplier made a change and didn't tell Rawlings, then they wouldn't even know there was a difference. Until the ball started flying and pitchers started getting a lot more blisters, that is.

## ***FROM BLEACHER REPORT***

### **Albert Pujols and 2018's Struggling MLB Stars It's time to give up on**

By Zachary D. Rymer

With the 2018 Major League Baseball season moving further past small-sample-size territory, team executives should be running out of patience with struggling stars.

Some should be demoted. Others should be cut loose.

We're going to look at eight stars—all of whom are healthy, as it's not fair to pick on guys who are on the disabled list—who are deserving of either treatment. Some of them are making quite a lot of money and are therefore difficult to nudge aside or cast off. But even with them, the prospect of paying them for nothing has become preferable to paying them to keep playing.

Let's get this tough conversation started.

#### **Albert Pujols, Los Angeles Angels**

Between the remainder of his \$27 million salary for 2018 and the \$87 million he's owed between 2019 and 2021, Albert Pujols still has about \$100 million left on his 10-year, \$240 million deal.

Things are now at a point where the Los Angeles Angels should be comfortable eating all of that.

Pujols' descent from a great hitter to a bad hitter is official. He put up just a .672 OPS last year and he's improved to just .691 this year. His patience has long since disappeared. Now, his power is under water, too. Without those two abilities, his bat is largely useless.

Now that the 38-year-old has gotten his 3,000th hit out of the way, he really only has home run milestones to chase. At the rate he's going, it'll be a struggle for him to even get to 700 before his contract is up.

The Angels could afford to let Pujols be if they were in the middle of a long rebuild. Instead, they're in the thick of a tough American League West race. They can't afford to have any dead weight.

They'd be better off with a Luis Valbuena/Jefry Marte platoon at first and even better off with a trade acquisition at the cold corner. Neither is possible as long as Pujols is in the way.