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Matt Shoemaker bounces back with strong outing, but Angels lose to Indians

By Jeff Fletcher

THE GAME: The Angels lost 7-0 to the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday in Goodyear, Ariz. The game was 1-0 when the starting pitchers — Matt Shoemaker and Corey Kluber — left the game after five innings.

PITCHING REPORT: Shoemaker gave up one run in five innings, with seven strikeouts. It was one of the best outings for an Angels starter yet this spring, and a dramatic improvement from the six runs Shoemaker allowed in his last outing. He did it against the Indians’ everyday lineup. “You can’t focus on results, but we always want results,” Shoemaker said. “As competitors, we are results driven. We want to win and do well. So a game like today, take that and build off it.” … Left-hander Jose Alvarez gave up his first run of the spring, but it was not earned. … Blake Parker gave up five runs and recorded only two outs. Parker had started the spring with a couple rough outings, before posting two straight scoreless appearances. … Cam Bedrosian pitched a scoreless inning. He has not allowed a run in four innings.

HITTING REPORT: Facing two-time Cy Young winner Kluber, Shohei Ohtani was hit by a pitch and he popped out. Ohtani, who struck out in his final at-bat against Carlos Torres, is now 2 for 20 this spring. “We’re trying to get him to shorten up a little bit, shorten up his leg kick so he can get to stuff inside,” hitting coach Eric Hinske said. Manager Mike Scioscia said they still believe Ohtani will hit: “He has a good routine. He’s confident he’s gonna find it, just as we’re confident he’s gonna find it.” … Kole Calhoun was the only Angel to have a hit in five innings against Kluber. … Albert Pujols, who struck out twice against Kluber, remained in the game for a third plate appearance, after most other starters had left. He grounded out.

DEFENSE REPORT: Pujols, at first base, made a nice lunging play to his left. … Shortstop Colin Walsh made an error that led to a run.

UP NEXT: Angels (Andrew Heaney) vs. Rockies (Tyler Anderson), Thursday, 1 p.m. PT, Salt River Fields, no TV/radio; Angels (Parker Bridwell) vs. White Sox (Lucas Giolito), Thursday, 6 p.m. PT, Tempe Diablo Stadium, Fox Sports West/KLAA (830 AM)

Carlos Perez tries to impress Angels amid roster crunch

By Jeff Fletcher

TEMPE, Ariz. — Baseball players are trained to focus on what they can control, even when outside factors would seem to be overwhelming.

That’s why Carlos Perez is doing his best to think of this spring like any other, despite his difficult circumstances.
Perez is out of options, with no apparent big league spot behind starter Martin Maldonado and backup René Rivera. Perez has also been good enough — including 184 major league games and a breakout offensive season at Triple-A in 2017 — that it seems unlikely he’d pass through waivers unclaimed.

So it’s possible Perez’s life could be uprooted in the next two weeks, either by being traded or claimed on waivers. C.J. Cron, also out of options, was traded last month in a similar spot.

“I’m not really thinking about it,” Perez said. “I’m just trying to do my job and show these people I can play. Doing my job is the only thing I can do.”

Just two years ago, Perez was on his way to being the Angels’ opening day catcher. Although he slumped offensively in 2016 and lost his job to Jett Bandy, he still performed well enough defensively to be a finalist for the Gold Glove.

Last season, the Angels got Maldonado to be the starter, and eventually Perez also slipped behind Juan Graterol. The Angels prefer Graterol to Perez defensively, but Graterol didn’t hit. That led to the signing of Rivera, a veteran good enough on both sides to spell Maldonado.

That leaves Perez, 27, in a tough spot, although now with an eye-opening offensive season on his minor league resume. Perez said he changed his approach at the plate last spring, and it led to a .352 average and a .925 OPS at Triple-A. He’s 5 for 20 so far this spring.

“I am more aggressive at the plate, looking for my pitch and driving it,” he said. “I am happy for what I did last year, and hopefully I can do it again this year.”

On the mend

Andrelton Simmons, who has been out for six days because of a strained left shoulder, could return to the lineup as soon as Thursday, Manager Mike Scioscia said.

Simmons said he’s been hitting, running and fielding, all at “controlled” levels. Simmons, who had been 0 for 9 at the time of his injury, said he’s eager to get back and get himself going before opening day.

“The timing is still a work in progress, but I’m seeing the ball good,” Simmons said. “I’m lucky it’s still spring training.”

Chris Young (strained calf) and Jefry Marte (tight groin) are also scheduled to play Thursday. Young, who was hurt on the second day of full-squad workouts, still has not played in a game. Young, Marte and Nolan Fontana (shoulder inflammation) all hit in Tuesday’s intrasquad game, but Fontana is still not ready to play.

Also

The Angels have the first of two night games at Tempe Diablo Stadium on Thursday, a 6 p.m. start against the Chicago White Sox. For years, the Angels didn’t play home night games in the spring, partly because the lights weren’t up to major league standards. Although improved, the lights still aren’t as
good as those in other Cactus League parks. Last year, eight Angels pitchers combined to throw a no-hitter in their night game at Tempe Diablo Stadium. That result may have been partly because of the lights and partly because the Seattle Mariners sent a skeleton squad for the night game. ...

Scioscia said most of the Angels’ everyday players would play in the day game Thursday against the Colorado Rockies in Scottsdale.

**Hoornstra: Pace of play rule could put pitching prospects at greater risk for injury**

By J.P. HOORNSTRA | PUBLISHED: March 14, 2018

Stan Conte, the former head athletic trainer for the Dodgers and San Francisco Giants, once remarked that the human shoulder is made for throwing. But, he said, “it may not have been designed to throw as hard as it can 120 times in a two-hour period.”

If baseball were to create a rule to increase the risk of injuring its pitchers, it might look like the one announced Wednesday.

All Double-A and Triple-A pitchers will be required to deliver a pitch within 15 seconds when there are no runners on base. With runners on, pitchers will be limited to 20 seconds. These were among the new pace-of-play initiatives that Minor League Baseball created, in partnership with MLB, to be instituted this season.

There will also be limits on mound visits – six at Triple-A, eight at Double-A, 10 at Class-A. MLB has already restricted its managers, coaches and players to six mound visits in every nine-inning game this season.

Judging by the armchair reaction on social media, the final initiative elicited the most shock: a runner will automatically be placed on second base to begin each inning after the ninth. A variation on this rule has been tried at different professional and amateur levels, including last year’s World Baseball Classic.

In the 11th inning of a semifinal between Puerto Rico and the Netherlands at Dodger Stadium, each half-inning began with runners on first and second. Puerto Rico won in the bottom of the 11th, wasting little time. That was the point.

The purpose of the pitch clock is just as obvious. When the advanced-A Florida State League instituted a 15-second pitch clock in 2016, the average time of game fell from 2:41 to 2:35 according to data provided by Minor League Baseball. The introduction of 20-second pitch clocks in the International League (Triple-A), Pacific Coast League (Triple-A), Eastern League (Double-A), Southern League (Double-A) and Texas League (Double-A) in 2015 hastened average game times in each league, up to 16 minutes per game.
Some players who are familiar with the pitch-clock system were more wary of the consequences on the game than their health. Maybe their priorities are backward.

Officially, neither Minor League Baseball nor the Florida State League records injury data. Disabled list usage can be insightful, though it isn’t a perfect proxy for injuries. (Some teams, like the Dodgers, were notorious for their liberal use of the 10-day DL in 2017.) It’s even less meaningful in the minors, where a “player-coach” might reside on the disabled list all year, only to be activated in case of emergency.

Pitcher DL usage in the Florida State League, however dubious, rose as the time of game fell. According to a study by the analyst Jon Roegele, FSL pitchers made 89 trips to the DL in 2015 and 106 in 2016, the first year of the pitch clock.

Meanwhile, the California League and the Carolina League, baseball’s other “advanced-A” leagues, did not institute a 15-second clock. Their pitchers’ DL visits didn’t rise in 2016 – in fact, Roegele’s data observed the opposite. What might the data be telling us?

Michael Sonne earned his Ph.D. in Kinesiology at McMaster University studying workplace fatigue. He and colleague Peter J. Keir published a study in the Journal of Sport Sciences titled “Major League Baseball pace-of-play rules and their influence on predicted muscle fatigue during simulated baseball games.”

Sonne and Keir concluded that reducing the time between pitches to 20 seconds or less might impair recovery from arm fatigue, with negative implications for elbow injuries in particular. Sound science could have predicted the DL surge that was actually observed in the Florida State League.

Now, with a 15-second limit, Double-A and Triple-A pitchers could be at greater risk too. Pat O’Conner, the president of Minor League Baseball, said he hasn’t personally researched any injury-risk studies, but he offered a few reasons not to worry.

For one thing, O’Conner noted, the 20-second limit with runners on base is not new. Minor league pitchers have already had time to adapt. With the bases empty, he said that minor league pitchers are already pausing 12 to 14 seconds between pitches – an observation based on anecdotal evidence, not hard data.

“Fifteen seconds is not going to rush anybody,” he said.

Moreover, O’Conner said he began pace-of-play talks with officials from MLB and minor league clubs a year and a half ago. MLB’s baseball operations department communicated with all 30 clubs. Why, he asked, would teams agree to a rule that put their own players at risk?

“The players are all under contract to Major League Baseball,” he said. “It’s their players. I trust them implicitly and explicitly not to do something detrimental to the health of their players.”

That’s a fair point. And maybe it’s unfair to extrapolate what takes place in the lab to a full season on the field, where variables become hard to predict.
Still, the unintended consequences of these pace-of-play rules are worth monitoring. Will five-man minor league rotations disappear? Will two trends already in motion – stricter limits on prospects’ innings and pitch counts – only gain more steam?

The consequence of a pitch clock could even be something baseball hasn’t seen before – unlike the automatic runner on second, which at least had a trial run on an international stage. For now, it’s being counted as an acceptable cost of progress.

“You’re either growing or you’re dying, is a line out of a Lou Holtz commencement speech,” O’Conner said. “If we’re not evolving, what happens is we become irrelevant. A 20-game losing streak is nothing compared to losing your relevance.”

**FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**

**Angels' Shohei Ohtani continues to struggle during transition to the majors**

By Mike Digiovanna

It’s not just the results at the plate that should concern the Angels about Shohei Ohtani, the aspiring two-way player who went hitless in two at-bats in the team’s 7-0 exhibition loss to the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday and is batting .100 (two for 20) with seven strikeouts and three walks in nine games.

It’s the noticeable lack of quality in those at-bats from a long-and-lean 23-year-old who is blessed with considerable bat speed and power but is trying to make the difficult transition from the Japanese league, which many compare to triple-A caliber, to the major leagues.

The left-handed-hitting Ohtani has looked overmatched in some plate appearances. He appears to be guessing during others. Sometimes his feet are unsettled, which throws off his timing. He often pulls off inside pitches, leading to weak contact or no contact.

Wednesday was one of those all-of-the-above days for Ohtani, who did not look comfortable against Indians ace Corey Kluber, the two-time American League Cy Young Award winner with the nasty cut fastball and sharp curve, or right-handed reliever Carlos Torres.

Ohtani swung through two Kluber cutters before being hit on the front foot by a 2-and-2 curveball in the third inning. Kluber shattered Ohtani’s bat in the fifth, inducing a weak popup to second base. Facing Torres in the eighth, Ohtani couldn’t quiet his feet as he swung through an inside fastball for strike three.

"He’s up there battling, he’s trying to put a good swing on the ball," said Eric Hinske, the team’s first-year batting coach. "I’m trying to get him to shorten up a little bit, shorten his leg kick a little, so he can get to stuff inside, and to start looking for stuff so he can clear his lower half and get to the pitch."

Ohtani hit .322 with 22 home runs and 67 RBIs in 104 games for the Nippon-Ham Fighters in 2016, but he was limited by an ankle injury to 65 games in 2017, hitting .332 with eight homers and 31 RBIs.
Ohtani, who combines a fastball that has touched 100 mph with an assortment of breaking balls and off-speed pitches, is more advanced as a pitcher than a hitter. The right-hander, who will pitch against Colorado on Friday, is expected to have a greater impact on the mound.

But it is far too soon to consider scrapping the two-way experiment.

"His swing is good, his approach is good, it's about timing, like it is with a lot of hitters, and he'll find it," manager Mike Scioscia said. "Mechanically, he's fine. He has a good routine. He's confident he's gonna find it, just as we're confident he's gonna find it."

Hinske believes Ohtani's timing, confidence and execution will improve as he gets more comfortable in the box and sees more big league pitching.

"He just needs to keep playing, he needs to get regular at-bats and to keep doing his thing," Hinske said. "He's doing the best he can, working the right way. We're all staying positive and trying to get on the right path. Hopefully he starts getting a lot of base hits."

Under the lights

Scioscia said most of the Angels starters will play in Thursday's afternoon game against the Rockies at Salt River Fields, leaving a team of reserves to play a 6 p.m. game against the Chicago White Sox at Tempe Diablo Stadium.

The reason is obvious: Scioscia does not want to put his starters at risk in a stadium with substandard lights.

The Angels have hosted only one night game in 12 years, a 5 p.m. start that resulted in a combined no-hitter by eight Angels pitchers against Seattle last spring. The Angels will host another night game Monday against the Mariners.

Stadium manager Jerry Hall said the lights were replaced six years ago and are at a "triple-A level or better," referring to the minor leagues, not the battery size.

"They're not major league stadium lights," Scioscia said, "but they're definitely better than they were a few years ago."

**Spring training: Cleveland 7, Angels 0**

By Mike Digiovanna

AT THE PLATE: The Angels managed only one hit in five innings against Corey Kluber, the two-time American League Cy Young Award winner who struck out four batters, including Albert Pujols twice, and walked one at Goodyear, Ariz. Eric Young Jr., battling for a reserve outfield spot, entered in the sixth inning and had two of the Angels' five hits, a double and a single. Kole Calhoun singled once in two at-bats and is hitting .500 (11 for 22) with five RBIs.
ON THE MOUND: Matt Shoemaker, who had a 10.80 ERA in his first three starts, looked dominant while allowing one run and two hits, striking out seven and walking one in five innings. The right-hander's only blemish was Tyler Naquin's home run in the third inning. "Everything was working," Shoemaker said. "I was using the slider, split, curveball, knuckleball." Shoemaker was just kidding about the knuckleball, but all of the pitches he did throw were extremely sharp. Blake Parker couldn't say the same. The reliever was hammered for five runs and five hits, including Brandon Barnes' three-run homer, in two-thirds of an inning and has a Civil War-era 18.69 ERA in 4 1/3 innings of five games.

EXTRA BASES: Pujols made a nice play in the second inning, lunging toward the first base line to stop Bradley Zimmer's hard grounder and flipping to Shoemaker for the out. ... Shortstop Andrelton Simmons, out for six days because of a left-shoulder strain, and outfielder Chris Young, out since Feb. 20 because of a calf injury, are expected to play Thursday. Corner infielder Jefry Marte, out for 11 days because of a groin injury, entered Wednesday's game in the seventh inning. ... Corner infielder Luis Valbuena left camp to take a U.S. citizenship test in Florida.

UP NEXT: Colorado at 1 p.m. Thursday at Salt River Fields; Chicago White Sox at 6 p.m. at Tempe Diablo Stadium. TV: FS West (day game); Radio: 830.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Ohtani struggling with inside pitches at plate

Scioscia says his mechanics, approach are fine, confident he'll adjust

By Maria Guardado

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- Shohei Ohtani went hitless in three plate appearances Wednesday, but he could at least take solace in the fact that he wasn't the only Angels hitter to struggle against reigning American League Cy Young Award winner Corey Kluber, who allowed only one hit over five innings in the Indians' 7-0 win at Goodyear Ballpark.

Ohtani swung through two cutters from Kluber in his first plate appearance in the third inning, though he reached base after being hit on the right foot on a 2-2 pitch. In the fifth, Ohtani fell behind in the count, 0-2, to Kluber before popping out to second base. His final at-bat of the day came in the eighth against reliever Carlos Torres, who struck him out swinging.

Ohtani, who was not made available to reporters before departing Goodyear Ballpark, is now 2-for-20 (.100) with seven strikeouts and three walks in Cactus League play this spring, though he also went 2-for-8 in an intrasquad scrimmage at Tempe Diablo Stadium on Tuesday.

"It's good for him to get his feet wet," hitting coach Eric Hinske said. "He's up there battling. He's trying to put a good swing on the ball. I'm trying to get him to just shorten it up a bit, shorten his leg kick a little so he can get to stuff inside. Just start looking for stuff, so he can clear his lower half and get to the pitch."
The left-handed-hitting Ohtani batted .286 with an .859 OPS and 48 home runs in 1,170 plate appearances in Japan, but pitchers in Nippon Professional Baseball rarely pitched him inside to avoid putting him at risk for injury. That hasn't been the case so far in the Majors.

"It seems like he's struggling with the inside pitch, feet moving too much," manager Mike Scioscia said. "What are you seeing in the actual mechanics of his at-bats: His swing is good, his approach is good. It's about timing, like a lot of hitters, and he'll find it. Mechanically, he's fine. Eric and [assistant hitting coach] Paulie [Paul Sorrento] are getting a feel for him. We've seen a lot of video. We're seeing it first-hand now. He has a good routine.

"He's confident he's going to find it, just as we're confident he's going to find it."

Wednesday marked the fourth consecutive day that Ohtani took at-bats in a game setting, but he will not hit again until Sunday at the earliest, as he is scheduled to take the mound for his fourth start of the spring on Friday against the Rockies at Tempe Diablo Stadium.

Ohtani has not pitched in a Cactus League game since his spring debut on Feb. 24, with his two most recent outings coming in "B" games against Minor League competition. Ohtani, who has allowed 10 runs over seven innings with 16 strikeouts over his first three pitching appearances, is slated to throw approximately 75 pitches over five innings on Friday.

Andrelton close to returning for Angels

Flashy shortstop could return this week, along with Young, Marte

By Maria Guardado

TEMPE, Ariz. -- Shortstop Andrelton Simmons, who has not played since March 8 due to a strained left (non-throwing) shoulder, could return to action as soon as Thursday, manager Mike Scioscia said.

"If they put me out there, I'm playing," said Simmons, who has resumed throwing, hitting and running. "If they don't, I can only do so much."

Simmons said he hasn't encountered any lingering issues with his shoulder so far, though he has yet to test it under game conditions. He added that he's eager to get back in the batter's box to make sure his timing is in sync ahead of Opening Day. Simmons had gone hitless in his first nine Cactus League at-bats before being slowed by the injury.

"Timing is still a work in progress, but I'm seeing the ball good, so that's a good start," Simmons said. "I'm lucky it's still Spring Training. Not the best, not season-ready, but I'm making progress, and that's always good."

Outfielder Chris Young (strained right calf) and Jefry Marte (right groin tightness) are also expected to play Thursday. Young has yet to make his Cactus League debut this spring, as he tweaked his calf on the
second day of full-squad workouts. But he went 2-for-8 with two doubles in the Angels’ intrasquad scrimmage Tuesday.

"I was able to run those out, which was nice," Young said. "I felt good."

Shoemaker impresses

Matt Shoemaker delivered one of the best starts by an Angels pitcher this spring on Wednesday, surrendering just one run and striking out seven over five innings in a 7-0 loss to the Indians at Goodyear Ballpark.

The 31-year-old right-hander gave up two hits, including a leadoff home run to Tyler Naquin in the third, and walked one in his fourth Cactus League outing, lowering his spring ERA from 10.80 to 7.43. It was a nice rebound for Shoemaker, who had allowed six runs over 3 2/3 innings in his previous start against the Cubs on Friday.

"Just kind of persistence in spring and hard work," Shoemaker said. "In spring, we're all here to get ready. We know that, and that's why you can't focus on results, but we always want results. As competitors, we're always results-driven. We want to win, we want to do well. When that [bad outing] happens, take that, let's build off that and keep going."

Valbuena excused

Luis Valbuena had originally been penciled in to start at third base against the Indians on Wednesday, but he was removed from the lineup because he had to travel to Florida to take a U.S. citizenship test, Scioscia said. Kaleb Cowart started at third in his place.

Camp battle

Jose Alvarez allowed an unearned run on two hits and struck out one in the sixth inning. Cam Bedrosian followed and worked around two walks to post a scoreless seventh. He struck out two. Blake Parker faced eight batters in the eighth and recorded only two outs, allowing five runs on five hits, including a three-run homer to Brandon Barnes. Parker, who finished last season as the Angels' preferred closing option, has yielded nine runs over 4 1/3 innings (18.69 ERA) in five appearances this spring.

Friendly pitching duel

Tyler Skaggs and Nick Tropeano pitched five innings apiece in the Angels' intrasquad scrimmage on Tuesday, when the club had a scheduled off-day. Skaggs gave up one run in the first inning and struck out eight, while Tropeano gave up three runs (one unearned) in the first.

"I felt great," Skaggs said. "I felt strong. I felt like I was throwing harder in the last two innings than I was the first two. First inning took me a little bit to lock it in, kind of felt a little weird out there. Not much adrenaline. After they got a few hits, I started locking it in."
Up next: The Angels will play some split-squad action on Thursday, facing the Rockies in Scottsdale at 1:10 p.m. PT before hosting the White Sox at Tempe Diablo Stadium at 6:10 p.m. PT, which can be watched live on MLB.TV. Andrew Heaney will start against Colorado, with Parker Bridwell pitching the nightcap against Chicago. Scioscia said most of the Angels' regular position players will be in the lineup for the day game.

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**FROM MLB.COM**

**Top prospects: Who’s still up? Who got cut?**

By Daniel Kramer and Matt Kelly

With Opening Day nearing, some of MLB Pipeline's finest could be breaking camp with their respective big league clubs.

For many, this spring was their first in Major League camp. Many have shined, some have struggled, but all gave their clubs an opportunity to see them compete against Major League competition. With that in mind, here's a breakdown of every one of MLB Pipeline's Top 100 prospects who got a shot in big league camp, and whether they're still there or have been sent down.

**STILL COMPETING FOR ROSTER SPOT**

1. Shohei Ohtani, Angels, LHP/DH
   One of the offseason's biggest stories, Ohtani has struggled at the plate (.111/.238/.111) and on the mound (two earned runs in 1 1/3 innings of official Spring Training action, plus a rough outing in a "B" game vs. the Tijuana Toros), though he's shown flashes of plate discipline and off-the-charts stuff off the bump. Still, given Ohtani's acclaim, it would be a shock if he wasn't in the Angels' rotation come Opening Day.

**REASSIGNED TO MINORS**

93. Jahmai Jones, Angels CF
   Once a dual-sport athlete who excelled as a wide receiver -- and with a father and brother with NFL experience -- Jones excelled in the Minors last year. However, he went just 2-for-17 in the Cactus League this spring, his first with the big-league club, and was re-assigned on Saturday. Jones will likely begin the season with High-A Inland Empire but look for him to reach Double-A Mobile at some point in 2018.

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

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**Kluber dominates lineup of Angels regular**

By Fabian Ardaya
GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- Corey Kluber's dominance can be most brutal to hitters who aren't accustomed to the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner's late movement and assortment of secondary pitches.

Just look at the final batter Kluber faced in Wednesday's 7-0 win over the Angels: Japanese superstar Shohei Ohtani.

With two outs in the fifth inning, Kluber started Ohtani by catching the corner low and inside. Then he made the slugger swing and miss badly at an 87-mph breaking ball low and in. The third pitch, a high cutter, cracked Ohtani’s bat and resulted in a softly hit popup that was easily brought in by second baseman Jason Kipnis.

Over five scoreless innings, Kluber faced 16 batters -- one over the minimum -- allowing one hit and three baserunners while striking out four on 56 pitches. He threw 15 more pitches in the bullpen as he looks to continue building his volume of pitches before Opening Day.

"He was so economical, we had to send him out to the bullpen," manager Terry Francona said. "He was good. He is so good about his progression. Every outing, he gets a little sharper, gets a little deeper. It's really fun to watch."

"Obviously, you want to feel good throughout your delivery and try to iron out things like that," Kluber said of his progress this spring. "I wouldn't say it's just building up the amount you throw. I think that's one of the important things, but I think you're also working on commanding all your pitches, things like that.

"I think I'm right on track with where I want to be."

Kluber faced a lineup full of Angels regulars -- including Ohtani, former AL MVP Mike Trout, Justin Upton, Albert Pujols and Kole Calhoun, who recorded the club's lone hit off Kluber with a dribbler through the hole in the second inning -- handling the group well and inducing eight swings and misses.

Just four balls in play even left the infield, including back-to-back flyouts by Ian Kinsler and Trout to open the game.

"It was pretty close to their regular lineup, so I don't want to say that you don't treat it the same when it's not like that, but I think you just naturally get a little bit more adrenaline going," Kluber said of facing the regulars. "When I'm facing close to their everyday lineup, if not their actual everyday lineup, it just naturally helps. It's good to keep working on that."

Kluber faced trouble just once, when a hit batter, a walk and a runner advancing on an infield fly rule gave the Angels runners on the corners with one out in the third inning. He would get out of it, catching Kinsler out in front of an offspeed pitch and inducing an inning-ending double play.

"The third inning was pretty bad [command-wise], but other than that, it was OK," Kluber said. "I just got really quick to the plate, and couldn't really make the adjustment. I guess that's a positive you can take
out of it, you get in that situation and you're one pitch away. It was ugly, but I found a way to make that one pitch.

"I think that days like today where you don't feel like you really are in a good rhythm or in sync, you get to work on making those adjustments in-game."

"It was really fun to watch him self-correct," Francona said. "He breezed through, like, seven [batters] in a row [after], and he figured it out."

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FROM MiLB.COM

MiLB announces pace-of-play regulations for 2018

Extra innings to begin with runners on base, mound visits limited

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Minor League Baseball today announced rule and procedure changes aimed at reducing the length of extra innings games and the number of mound visits during a game throughout Minor League Baseball. In addition, the Triple-A and Double-A levels will use a 15-second pitch clock with no runners on base.

The procedures, created in partnership with Major League Baseball, aim to reduce the number of pitchers used in extra innings and the issues created by extra innings games, including, but not limited to, shortages of pitchers in the days to follow, the use of position players as pitchers and the transferring of players between affiliates due to pitching shortages caused by extra innings games.

"We believe these changes to extra innings will enhance the fans' enjoyment of the game and will become something that the fans will look forward to on nights where the game is tied late in the contest," said Minor League Baseball President Pat O'Connor. "Player safety has been an area of growing concern for our partners at the Major League Baseball level, and the impact that lengthy extra innings games has on pitchers, position players and an entire organization was something that needed to be addressed."

EXTRA INNINGS

- At all levels of Minor League Baseball, extra innings will begin with a runner on second base. The runner at second base will be the player in the batting order position previous to the leadoff batter of the inning (or a substitute for that player). By way of example, if the number five hitter in the batting order is due to lead off the 10th inning, the number four player in the batting order (or a pinch-runner for such player) shall begin the inning on second base. Any runner or batter removed from the game for a substitute shall be ineligible to return to the game, as is the case in all circumstances under the Official Baseball Rules.
• For purposes of calculating earned runs under Rule 9.16, the runner who begins an inning on second base pursuant to this rule shall be deemed to be a runner who has reached second base because of a fielding error, but no error shall be charged to the opposing team or to any player.

PITCHER’S MOUND VISITS

• Visits by coaches and position players will be limited based on the classification level. Triple-A clubs will be allowed six (6) visits per team, Double-A clubs will be allowed eight (8) visits per team, Single-A clubs will be allowed 10 visits per team and there will not be a limit on mound visits for Short Season and Rookie-level clubs.

• These mound visit limits will apply whether the game is scheduled for seven or nine innings.

• For any extra-innings played, each club shall be entitled to one additional non-pitching change mound visit per inning.

• Official Baseball Rule 5.10(l), which governs mound visits by a manager or coach, remains in effect (i.e., a pitcher must be removed on the second visit by a manager/coach in an inning).

Definition of Mound Visit:

A manager or coach trip to the mound to meet with the pitcher shall constitute a visit. A player leaving his position to confer with the pitcher, including a pitcher leaving the mound to confer with another player, shall also constitute a mound visit, regardless of where the visit occurs or the length of the visit, except that the following shall not constitute mound visits:

• a. Discussions between pitchers and position player(s) that (i) occur between batters in the normal course of play and do not require either the position player(s) or the pitcher to relocate;

• b. Visits by position players to the mound to clean spikes in rainy conditions;

• c. Visits to the mound due to an injury or potential injury of the pitcher; and

• d. Visits to the mound after the announcement of an offensive substitution.

Cross-Up in Signs:

In the event a team has exhausted its allotment of mound visits in a game (or extra inning) and the home plate umpire determines that the catcher and pitcher did not have a shared understanding of the location or type of pitch that had been signaled by the catcher (otherwise referred to as a "cross-up"), the home plate umpire may, upon request of the catcher, allow the catcher to make a brief mound visit. Any mound visit resulting from a cross-up prior to a team exhausting its allotted number of visits shall count against a team's total number of allotted mound visits.

15-SECOND PITCH TIMER
• Pitchers at the Triple-A and Double-A levels will be allowed 15 seconds to begin their wind-up or the motion to come to the set position when no runners are on base.

• The pitcher does not necessarily have to release the ball within 15 seconds, but must begin his wind-up or begin the motion to come to the set position to comply with the 15-second rule with no runners on base.

• With runners on base, the pitch timer will go from 15 to 20 seconds.

• The timer shall start when the pitcher has possession of the ball in the dirt circle surrounding the pitcher's rubber, the catcher is in the catcher's box and the batter is in the dirt circle surrounding home plate.

• The timer will stop as soon as the pitcher begins his wind-up, or begins the motion to come to the set position.

• If the pitcher feints a pick off or steps off the rubber with runners on base, the timer shall reset and start again immediately.

• Umpires have the authority to stop the pitch timer and order a reset.

• Following any event (e.g., pick-off play) that permits the batter to leave the batter's box, the timer shall start when the pitcher has possession of the ball in the dirt circle surrounding the pitcher's rubber, and the catcher is in the catcher's box.

• Following an umpire's call of "time" or if the ball becomes dead and the batter remains at-bat, the timer shall start after the next pitch or play.

• Should the pitcher fail to begin his wind-up or begin the motion to come to the set position in 15 seconds with no runners on base, or 20 seconds with a runner on base, a ball will be awarded to the count on the batter.

• Should the batter fail to be in the batter's box and alert to the pitcher with seven (7) or more seconds remaining on the pitch timer, a strike will be awarded to the count on the batter.

• The first 15 days of the season (April 5-19), will serve as a grace period, with players receiving warnings for infractions. Beginning April 20, rules will be enforced as written.

"We feel that limiting mound visits and decreasing the amount of time between pitches with no runners on base will further improve the pace of play and make it a more enjoyable experience for our fans," said O’Conner.
Angels’ Andrew Heaney on the move again, hoping to rediscover earlier form

By Pedro Moura

TEMPE, Ariz. — In the fall of 2013, Andrew Heaney began to pitch from the first-base (or arm) side of the rubber. For the then-22-year-old left-hander, it was a small change, not 24 inches from his old manner. But it produced a significant, positive result: He dominated the Arizona Fall League and made his big-league debut before the subsequent summer.

His career trending upward, he opened 2016 as the Angels’ No. 2 starter, matching up with Jon Lester in the season’s second game. Three innings in, Heaney tore the ulnar collateral ligament in his left elbow. He tried, unsuccessfully, to avoid Tommy John surgery, succumbing that July. As he readied to mount his comeback, the Angels presented him a suggestion to switch back.

“Statistically, if you’re on the glove side of the rubber, you’re not cross-firing as much,” Heaney recalled club officials relaying. “A lot less torque and leverage on your arm. It’s supposed to be healthier. Guys that are on that side tend to have fewer issues.”

So, from the moment he returned to the mound last March until his final start in September, Heaney threw from the third-base side.

“It’s something they kind of a sked me to do,” he said before citing statistics showing that 15 percent of Tommy John surgery recipients do not reach their previous level. “At that point, it’s like, if this is gonna make me healthy, I’m gonna try it.”

The results were disastrous: In 21 2/3 innings, Heaney surrendered 12 homers, a rate of five per nine innings. No major league pitcher had ever thrown 20 or more innings in a season and allowed more than 4.44 homers per nine.

While lobbying to return from a minor shoulder ailment in the season’s final week, Heaney reverted to his old position. He is staying that way this spring and experiencing the results he expected.

“At some point, you think, you’re gonna be healthy for 15 years but give up a homer every other inning, that’s not going to be effective,” Heaney said. “I’m not just saying, ‘Fuck my health, I’m going to go out there and sling this shit.’ But I’m also gonna go out there and do what gets guys out.

“Nothing drives you crazy like giving up 15 homers in 20 innings, right? That’s, like, historically bad. I just got to the point where I said, ‘Fuck it. I’m going to the first-base side again.’”

Heaney said the Angels never ordered him to throw from the third-base side. It was a suggestion, one he initially welcomed. And he never examined data demonstrating the lessened injury risk.

“They didn’t have to send me a pamphlet on it,” he said, “but it was explained to me that way.”
No such study exists publicly, and Angels general manager Billy Eppler declined to speak specifically about what the club presented the pitcher.

“We brought it up as an idea,” Eppler said. “We didn’t say, ‘Hey, go do this.’ We tend to present information to our players that might be beneficial. It was more baked in straight direction to the plate rather than, ‘Hey, do this because it’s solely injury-based.’ When you talk about direction to the plate, the more direct you can be, it’s efficient.”

Heaney has studied his delivery. He is convinced that throwing from the first-base side supplies him an advantage in more angle and deception to the batter. Because his body is closed off during his delivery, he can pull his body with force and still find himself facing squarely toward home plate when done. Starting from the third-base side, he starts off squared.

“You want that extra degree of rotation that adds extra force,” he said. “For me, it’s just more comfortable.”

Now 26, Heaney is in line to begin 2018 as the Angels’ No. 3 starter. He has pitched on a standard starter’s schedule this spring but is open to moving into a six-man rotation come opening day.

“If I’m on the team, I don’t care how many fucking starts I make, I’m happy,” he said. “For me, as long as I know the day after I pitch when the next time I’m pitching is, it’s not a big deal.”

He expects to be given that information. Every five or every six days, he will be eager to amend the frustration he felt last season. He described a feeling of fighting himself in between his five starts, certain he was better than he was showing.

He understands that standing some inches away from where he once did won’t turn him from bullied to bully. He understands that he made it back from Tommy John earlier than even the organization expected and that pitchers do not typically pitch at their best in their first post-surgery season.

“I’m not saying it’s all one thing,” Heaney said. “But, in my head, I just don’t think it’s coincidence that I came out here and feel so good on the first-base side and I’m throwing lots of strikes with everything in the vicinity of where I want it to be.”

The Angels maintain they are content with his adjusted approach.

“At the end of the day, we want our players to be comfortable with what they’re doing,” Eppler said. “You want to get feedback on how things feel, and not necessarily be beholden to the result. If they feel good, results with follow.”
2018 Preview: Los Angeles Angels

By Craig Calcaterra

Between now and Opening Day, HardballTalk will take a look at each of baseball’s 30 teams, asking the key questions, the not-so-key questions, and generally breaking down their chances for the 2018 season. Next up: The Los Angeles Angels.

The Angels made some aggressive moves this offseason. They may have had the most active offseason of anyone, in fact. Specifically:

- They signed Justin Upton to a five-year, $106 million contract extension;
- The signed All-Star shortstop Zack Cozart and turned him into a third baseman;
- They traded for Tigers second baseman Ian Kinsler; and
- They won the Shohei Ohtani sweepstakes, giving them a potential ace and a potential power threat in one package.

But is that enough?

The Angels flirted with the Wild Card at times last season, ultimately falling five games short. They also had to do without baseball’s best player, Mike Trout for all of June and half of July. Some might say that made the difference, but the truth of the matter is that the Angels had a lot of problems beyond Trout’s time on the DL. Most notably, they were near the bottom of the AL in offense and, once again, the pitching staff suffered a slew of injuries.

What went right for them? The bullpen was unexpectedly good, Andrelton Simmons had his best year at the plate and, even with the time on the disabled list, Mike Trout was Mike Trout and that carries you a long way. Or, at least to 80 wins. For them to move beyond 80 wins and into serious playoff contention territory, they’re going to need a lot more.

For one thing they, more than most contenders, need some good luck with health in the rotation.

Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs, Matt Shoemaker, and JC Ramirez have all suffered serious injuries in recent years and all of them will need to be healthy this year for the Halos to be competitive. Between them, Ohtani, Andrew Heaney, Parker Bridwell and Nick Tropeano, there are seven or eight good starting pitchers hanging around. All of them will be necessary given that (a) there has been talk of the Angels using a six-man rotation; (b) even if they don’t, formally, go to a six-man, Ohtani’s workload will probably limit him, on average, to a start a week, requiring a lot of spot starts; and (c) with this bunch, someone is likely to be hurt again. As has often been the case in recent years, the pitching looks good on paper in March. Whether the arms all hold up in practice will be the real question.
Before we move on, let me offer a brief aside about Shohei Ohtani.

He got all of the offseason press, both because of his promise — he’s a two way star! — and because of the sweepstakes to get him. It’s important to put the hype aside now, though, and think of him as just a baseball player. As a pitcher he has a chance to be something special based on his scouting reports, but so far he hasn’t shown much in spring training. As a hitter he looks pretty overmatched so far, but that could be rust, as he only hit in 65 games last year. There will be adjustments for the young man, and those adjustments will likely take longer than the Angels will be in Tempe for spring training. All of which is to say that, even if I think he has a great future in major league baseball, it’s easy to expect too much of him in 2018. As such, view any Angels previews that place too much emphasis on how he does with a skeptical eye.

Let us continue.

As mentioned, the bullpen was a blessing for the Angels last year, with Yusmeiro Petit, Blake Parker and Bud Norris anchoring the late innings. Only Parker is back from that crew and joining him for eighth and ninth inning work will be Cam Bedrosian, who showed emerging greatness in 2016 and, some nagging injuries aside, some nice stretches last year. Filling out the group will be new acquisition Jim Johnson, Keynan Middleton, Jose Alvarez, Noe Ramirez and whoever isn’t in the rotation at any given time. It’s hard to see that group being as good as the Angels had last year — Johnson was downright terrible in Atlanta — but no one really thought what the Angels had last year would be as good as it was either. The good thing here is that Mike Scioscia showed last season that he was not as hidebound as many accuse of him of being. He used relievers in different roles at different times and that’s a good approach to take when you have a lot of unknowns.

Ultimately, though, the Angels will rise and fall based on how their lineup does.

Mike Trout is Mike Trout and, barring injury, will be a top MVP candidate again. Andrelton Simmons made himself a useful offensive player last year, posting an OPS+ of 103. With his glove, that makes him among the most valuable players in the league. It’ll be interesting to see if, in his age 28 season, he maintains that level or if 2017 was a fluke. Justin Upton came over in a trade last last season and gave the Angels a second offensive threat for the first time in a long time. Overall it was the second best offensive season of his career. If he’s that Justin Upton once again, good things are happening in the middle of the order.

New third baseman Zack Cozart had a breakout offensive year in 2017. Though there’s a good chance he falls back to earth a good bit in 2018, the converted shortstop should be a plus defender at the hot corner, making the left side of the Angels’ infield something special. New second baseman Ian Kinsler put up his worst season as a major leaguer last year. At age 36 a bounceback is not something to bet the mortgage on, but given the black hole that was the second base slot for the Angels last year, he’ll likely represent an improvement for the club, even at a diminished-for-him level. His glove remains solid.
Speaking of diminished, Albert Pujols is still there. He only played six games at first base last year, but will likely see more time there in 2018 due to the plan to let Ohtani DH a couple of times a week. If Pujols doesn’t cover first on those days Luis Valbuena will stay there and Pujols will ride pine. That’ll be the right thing to do regardless given how Pujols is mostly cooked as a hitter, though Pujols’ contract and status may see him playing more than he deserves to at this point in his career. Martin Maldonado and Kole Calhoun round things out. Neither are dangerous hitters, but Calhoun at least has shown more in the past than he did in 2017.

Overall, it’s reasonable to assume that the Angels offense will improve in 2018. Maybe not a ton, but if Trout stays in the lineup, Upton, Cozart and Kinsler provide the upgrades they figure to be and everyone else at least maintains, things should come up from where they were offensively speaking in 2017. With that, some health in the rotation and the upgraded defense on what was already an above average defensive team, the Angels should be pretty interesting.

Interesting enough to catch the Astros? Nah. Not seeing that at all. This is, at best, I think, a 90 win team, perhaps, if things break well and maybe an 85-win team if they don’t break well but they avoid disasters. That’ll play, though. It’ll be enough to challenge the runners up in the AL Central and AL East for one of the two Wild Card slots.

Prediction: Second Place, AL West.

MLB season preview: Which teams didn’t do enough this offseason?

Editor’s note: From now until opening day, Yahoo Sports will be getting you ready for the 2018 MLB season with a series of previews and roundtable discussions with our writers. Today, we’re talking about which teams didn’t do enough this offseason.

We just finished a baseball offseason that will never be remembered for its brisk pace or excitement. Still, a number of teams were able to navigate the frigid free-agent class and improve their rosters. The Boston Red Sox, New York Yankees, Milwaukee Brewers, Philadelphia Phillies and Minnesota Twins are all teams that, on paper, enter 2018 better than they were in 2017.

Not everyone is so lucky, of course. One team’s gain is usually another team’s loss.

So that means we’re left with some teams that just don’t seem like they did enough. These are the teams that opted to grow from within instead of nabbing a free agent or making a big trade. Or they opted for the cheaper free agent instead of the one who cost $100 million.

For today’s installment of our MLB season preview, we’re talking about the teams that might not have done enough. Our panel of writers drop their picks below. And if you missed ’em, we’ve already talked about the breakout teams of the 2018 and the teams that could disappoint.
**MARK TOWNSEND:** Cleveland Indians
Even with the losses of Carlos Santana and Bryan Shaw, the Indians will be heavy favorites to win the American League Central and a threat to play deep into October. With that said, it would have been nice to see them find a way to make a splash that better positions them to compete with the Yankees and Astros. This Indians championship window is still open, but it feels like they could be a tier below the elite heading into 2018. Yonder Alonso won’t change that, but the good news is there’s still plenty of time before October to get what they need.

**CHRIS CWIK:** Los Angeles Angels
The Angels struck early in free agency, picking up Zack Cozart and surprising everyone by winning the Shohei Ohtani sweepstakes. Both players will help immensely and might make the Angels a popular wild-card pick. While Ohtani should deliver as a pitcher, the downside of his signing is that the team has moved to a six-man rotation. That strategy can work if you have plenty of productive and reliable pitchers. Unfortunately, the Angels have none of those. You know how many pitchers currently slated for the Angels’ rotation threw 100 innings or more last season? Just one. The rest, including Ohtani, were limited by injuries in 2017. And that might not improve. Tyler Skaggs, Andrew Heaney and Garrett Richards have experienced multiple injury-riddled seasons already. Signing at least one veteran pitcher with a track record of eating innings would have gone a long way.

**MIKE OZ:** St. Louis Cardinals
First off, I love the move to get Marcell Ozuna, who gives St. Louis a much-needed power boost in its lineup. The Cardinals made some other small moves to fine-tune their roster and they have every reason to think they’ll be good in 2018. Good enough to beat the Cubs, though? That’s really the question. The answer remains no. And if not the Cubs, are they good enough to get a wild-card spot? The Cardinals are betting on the likes of Jedd Gyorko and Kolten Wong this year, who are decent but not great players. It makes you wonder if getting, say, Mike Moustakas to play third might have closed the gap with the Cubs? Or getting a dependable closer that might help immensely come September. It could be the difference between a wild-card spot and another disappointing season.

**LIZ ROSCHER:** Arizona Diamondbacks
There was one thing the Diamondbacks absolutely had to do this offseason, and that was keep J.D. Martinez. Instead, Martinez signed with the Red Sox and the Diamondbacks got a bullpen cart. Unless it’s a magical bullpen cart, it won’t be able to replace Martinez’s stellar 2017 production. And neither will Steven Souza, the D-backs’ only significant offseason acquisition. He was traded to the D-backs mid-February, but he brings just a fraction of what Martinez would. The team had trouble with its starting rotation, and is now keeping an eye on Zack Greinke’s velocity. After such a strong 2017, the D-backs could have gone all-in and tried to build. Instead, the team looks to have taken a step backward.
Which top MLB prospects will make their team’s opening day roster?

By Mark Townsend

With opening day now just two weeks away, MLB teams are starting to make some notable cuts from their major-league camp.

Among the names catching our eye right now are many of the game’s top prospects. Players like Eloy Jimenez, for example. The exciting Chicago White Sox outfield prospect was deemed not quite ready for the big leagues on Wednesday. He was officially demoted to Chicago’s minor league camp, but his time will certainly come sooner than later.

Jimenez’s demotion answered one big question, but it naturally leads to many more surrounding some of baseball’s other top prospects. Right now, we’ll zero in on five prospects who entered camp with plenty of buzz and legitimate chances to break camp with their big league teams, and examine if that remains true with opening day fast approaching.

**Shohei Ohtani — Los Angeles Angels**

**Ranking:** No. 1 (according to MLB Pipeline)

Yeah, we’re putting Ohtani in the discussion. Not because there’s any question about his status in Angels’ camp, but because his performance has raised plenty of doubt elsewhere.

Ohtani’s every move this spring has been covered and analyzed to the nth degree, so there’s plenty of information to digest. Unfortunately, the reports haven’t been as encouraging as fans had hoped. Ohtani has struggled at the plate, hitting .100/.217/.100 through eight games. Yahoo Sports’ Jeff Passan recently noted that some scouts are so underwhelmed by Ohtani’s plate appearances, they believe he’ll need to further develop his offensive game in the minor leagues.

On the pitching side, Ohtani has flashed brilliance but has struggled with consistency. His velocity was down in a “B” game against the Tijuana Toros last week and he was roughed up, allowing six runs in three innings. The Angels obviously aren’t panicking on either front, but it’s enough to make some people wonder if he’s truly ready.

**Verdict:** He’ll make it. The Angels didn’t sign Ohtani to develop him. They signed Ohtani to make an instant impact. Despite the apparent need for development, the team will give him every chance to figure it out in MLB.

**Ronald Acuna — Atlanta Braves**

**Ranking:** No. 2

The 20-year-old outfielder has drawn comparisons to everyone from Mike Trout to Jason Heyward. He backed that up last season by being the best player in minor league baseball. He’s continued backing it
up this spring, entering Wednesday slashing .412/.512/.618 while mashing a pair of home runs and stealing four bases. Every day he looks more like a can’t miss prospect with superstar potential.

**Verdict:** Despite the glowing positives, he’ll have to wait. While there’s no doubt Acuna’s ready to feast on major-league pitching right now, or that he would instantly make the Braves a better team, they’ll want to delay starting his service time clock so they’ll have him under control for an extra year. It’s too bad, but we should see Acuna in the Braves outfield no later than July.

**Victor Robles — Washington Nationals**

**Ranking:** No. 6

Like Trea Turner did two seasons ago, Robles should add another dimension to Washington’s lineup when given the opportunity. He possesses a mix of power, speed and defense that would elevate any team he’s on. Even one as talented as Washington. In fact, they liked him enough to include him on the postseason roster last fall. Unfortunately, he’s not having the strongest spring, and the Nationals don’t have a real reason to force him on the roster just yet.

**Verdict:** He’ll start the season in the minors, but could be an early callup if Washington faces some injuries. The outfield is set right now with Bryce Harper, Adam Eaton, Michael A. Taylor and Brian Goodwin, but we know that’s not the most durable group around.

**Michael Kopech — Chicago White Sox**

**Ranking:** No. 10

Kopech’s stuff is as electric as anyone we’ve seen from any 21-year-old pitcher, and the truth is he’s probably ready for the opportunity to show his stuff on the big stage. The White Sox are in no hurry to unleash him though. With Dave Duncan coming in as an instructor, we’re guessing he’ll be spending a lot of time with Kopech refining what’s working and tweaking what isn’t so that he’ll be the best possible pitcher when called upon.

**Verdict:** Back to the minors… for now. His minor league outings have become must-see events over the last two seasons, and that will continue for at least a few more weeks.

**J.P. Crawford — Philadelphia Phillies**

**Ranking:** No. 37

The Jake Arrieta signing seemingly confirmed what we already knew about Philadelphia. The future is now after the organization has spent the past few seasons undergoing a complete rebuild. A big part of the future is Crawford, who was select 16th overall out of high school in the 2013 MLB Draft. Crawford got some MLB experience last season, hitting .214/.356/.300 over 70 at-bats. He hasn’t blown anyone away this spring either, hitting .240/.269/.320, but that shouldn’t impact the Phillies plans.
**Verdict:** He’ll be in the opening day lineup and barring some immense and prolonged struggles should remain there for several years to come.

FROM CLEVELAND.COM

Corey Kluber meets Shohei Ohtani: Cleveland Indians spring training lineup vs. Angels on Wednesday

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians, like so many other big league teams, started scouting Shohei Ohtani when he was playing high school baseball in Japan. The more they saw, the more they came to believe that he could do what he said he wanted to do -- pitch and hit in the big leagues.

Unlike a handful of other teams, the Indians knew they had little chance to induce Ohtani to come to Cleveland. Plus they had virtually no international bonus pool money to sign him as free agent.

Well, Wednesday the Indians will get an indication if their scouting reports were accurate, at least from a hitting point of view. Ohtani is scheduled to DH for the Angels when they play the Indians at 4:05 p.m. at Goodyear Ballpark.

The Dodgers, much like the Indians, scouted Ohtani in depth. They were one of the teams that Ohtani agreed to meet when he came to the United States in December to decide where he was going to play. The Dodgers brought Clayton Kershaw, Justin Turner and Chris Taylor to LA to help their recruiting pitch.

It didn’t work and Kershaw recently told the Los Angeles Times that the trip was a "waste of time." He said it appeared that Ohtani had already made up his mind to play for the Angels because he could DH and pitch instead of playing the outfield and pitch as he would have had to do in National League.

Kershaw said he wasn't upset with Ohtani, but rather his agent for the way he handled the recruiting process.

On March 7, the Dodgers faced the Angels in a spring training game. Kershaw, the three-time Cy Young winner, struck out Ohtani on a curveball. Ohtani won't get a break Wednesday as he faces two-time Cy Young winner Corey Kluber.

The 23-year-old Ohtani has had mixed results in his first big-league camp. He's hitting .111 (2-for-18) with one RBI, six strikeouts and one walk. On the mound, he's made one Cactus League start, posting a 6.75 ERA in 1 1/3 innings.
In a B game against the Brewers on March 2, he struck out eight of the 12 batters he faced in 2 2/3 innings.

Scouts told Jeff Passan of Yahoo.com that that the left-handed hitting Ohtani is going to struggle to hit big-league pitching because he can't hit a good curveball. They say he needs time in the minors, but the Angels have already announced they're going to go with a six-man rotation to make room for Ohtani.

Kluber, of course, has one of the best breaking balls in baseball.

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**FROM BLEACHER REPORT**

**Minor League Baseball to Put Runners on 2nd Base to Start Extra Innings**

By Tim Daniels

Minor League Baseball announced Wednesday a runner will be placed on second base at the start of all extra innings across every level of the minors beginning in the 2018 season.

Kyle Glaser of *Baseball America* passed along the rule change.

In January, Ronald Blum of the Associated Press reported Major League Baseball made a proposal to implement the same idea for the All-Star Game starting in the 11th inning as part of ongoing discussions about ways to improve the sport's overall pace of play.

While the AP report noted "MLB isn't considering using the rule in any games that count," it was used in the lowest level of the minor leagues last year and trimmed an average of 16 minutes off the extra-inning contests compared to the rest of the minors.

MLB commissioner Rob Manfred announced a series of pace-of-play changes last month, including a new limit on the number of mound visits allowed per game and a reduced time allotment for commercials between innings and during pitching changes.

"I am pleased that we were able to reach an understanding with the Players Association to take concrete steps to address pace of play with the cooperation of players," he said, per MLB.com. "My strong preference is to continue to have ongoing dialogue with players on this topic to find mutually acceptable solutions."

A pitch clock, which was also discussed during the offseason, wasn't included after player backlash.

It's unclear whether MLB will reconsider the extra-innings runner in 2019 after reviewing the results from the experiment in the minors. That rule could also receive resistance from players, especially relief pitchers, since it fundamentally changes the way the game is played.
MLB Power Rankings: Where All 30 Teams Stand, 2018 Mid-Spring Training Edition

By Joel Reuter

All the way back on Nov. 2, we published our first MLB power rankings of the offseason.

The idea behind that version was to set the stage for the upcoming offseason, with the approach to placing teams spelled out as follows:

"For the first edition of our offseason rankings, teams will be ranked based on their outlook for the 2018 season. That took into account things like how complete the roster is heading into free agency, how active the team is expected to be and the overall direction the franchise is headed."

Here at the midway point of spring training and with Opening Day rapidly approaching, it's time for an updated look at where all 30 teams stand.

In an effort to demonstrate which teams improved and declined the most relative to that early offseason perception from back in November, the up or down arrow beside each team reflects its placement relative to that article.

So without further ado, here’s a look at the updated rankings:

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**Biggest Risers**
It will always be easier to climb from the bottom of the rankings to the middle of the pack than it is to go from a .500 team to a legitimate top-tier team.

That's why you see the San Diego Padres (+5), Oakland Athletics (+5) and Philadelphia Phillies (+4) among the highest risers on this list, even if they're not quite ready to make that leap to legitimate contention just yet.

The Padres made the surprise splash of the offseason by signing Eric Hosmer to an eight-year, $144 million deal, and while that lone addition doesn't move the needle enough to call them contenders, it is a sign the Friars might be ready to make a push sooner than expected.

With another step forward from young MLB players like Dinelson Lamet, Manuel Margot and Austin Hedges, they could at least make life a little tougher on the rest of the NL West in 2018.

The Athletics, on the other hand, made a handful of solid, under-the-radar moves as opposed to one major signing.

Jonathan Lucroy and Stephen Piscotty were nice buy-low additions to the lineup, while a trio of newcomers in the bullpen—Yusmeiro Petit, Ryan Buchter and Emilio Pagan—along with a full season of Blake Treinen could make the relief corps a strength.

Also, keep an eye on Matt Chapman. He could be one of the breakout stars of 2018.

And then there's the Phillies, who finally spent some of the money they've been stockpiling while rebuilding.

Adding Carlos Santana (three years, $60 million) and Jake Arrieta (three years, $75 million) won't preclude them from making a splash next winter, but it also clearly makes them a better team in 2018. The NL East is a crapshoot behind the Washington Nationals, and a .500 record and second-place finish from the Phillies is not out of the question.

As for the perceived contenders, the Los Angeles Angels (+4), New York Yankees (+3) and Chicago Cubs (+3) have been the biggest risers.

The story of the offseason for the Angels was the surprise win in the Shohei Ohtani sweepstakes, but they also added Ian Kinsler and Zack Cozart to shore up the infield and re-signed slugger Justin Upton to a long-term deal.

What should be a more potent lineup will also be backed by a healthy rotation after Garrett Richards, Matt Shoemaker, Tyler Skaggs and Andrew Heaney all missed significant time last season.

The biggest question is the bullpen, with Cam Bedrosian and Blake Parker both short on closing experience. Still, this team looks like a serious wild-card threat at the very least.
Meanwhile, the Yankees took the reins in the AL East with a blockbuster deal to acquire Giancarlo Stanton, and that wasn't their only move.

They also filled in the gaps on the infield by signing Neil Walker and Brandon Drury, which will give prospects Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar more time to develop. Bringing back veteran CC Sabathia on a one-year deal also brings welcome stability to the back of the rotation.

The Red Sox countered with the J.D. Martinez signing, but the Yankees are still the team to beat in the division.

And finally, there's the Cubs.

The additions of Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood, and a full season of Jose Quintana, should again make the starting rotation one of the best in baseball.

It will be backed by a revamped bullpen, as Brandon Morrow and Steve Cishek replace Wade Davis and Hector Rondon after the relief corps buckled last postseason.

The St. Louis Cardinals and Milwaukee Brewers both improved in their own right, but the NL Central is the Cubs' to lose.

**Biggest Fallers**

The biggest slide relative to those early offseason rankings came from the Pittsburgh Pirates (-9) as a result of their decision to trade off Andrew McCutchen and Gerrit Cole.

There's still talent on the roster and down on the farm, but after back-to-back losing seasons on the heels of three straight playoff appearances, it was time for the small-market club to make a change.

It will be interesting to see what Joe Musgrove, Colin Moran and Michael Feliz can do in an expanded role—an opportunity they likely would not have received in Houston.

In the end, the development of young pitchers like Musgrove, Jameson Taillon, Tyler Glasnow, Trevor Williams, Chad Kuhl and prospect Mitch Keller will ultimately determine how quickly the Pirates can return to contention.

The other major drop came from the Miami Marlins (-6) following the fire sale that saw Stanton, Marcell Ozuna, Christian Yelich and Dee Gordon all moved in separate trades.

What's left is a shell of what the team once was offensively, and that weakened attack will be backed by the same subpar starting rotation that proved to be its undoing a year ago.

Don't be surprised if guys like J.T. Realmuto, Dan Straily and Brad Ziegler are next out the door.
The Tampa Bay Rays (-6) also drop significantly after trading away the likes of Evan Longoria, Jake Odorizzi, Steven Souza and Corey Dickerson in an effort to trim payroll, add more young talent and open up opportunities for some prospects who are knocking on the door.

Retooling like this is a necessary evil for one of baseball's smallest budgeted teams, and while it's hard to see them contending in the AL East, the starting rotation is still good enough that they could surprise some people.

And finally, we have the Seattle Mariners (-5), who failed to make a significant addition to the starting rotation, despite another winter of wheeling and dealing from Jerry Dipoto.

The rotation of James Paxton, Felix Hernandez, Erasmo Ramirez, Mike Leake and Marco Gonzales doesn't look good enough to lead them to contention in a tough AL West, and there's virtually nothing in the way of quality depth behind that group.

The offense is going to score a ton of runs, and the bullpen will benefit from the addition of Juan Nicasio, but it's hard to envision this being the year they finally return to the playoffs for the first time since 2001.

So there you have it: an abridged rundown of who's improved the most and who's fallen the farthest, based on early perceptions back at the start of the offseason.

FROM FANRAG SPORTS NETWORK

Heyman | In Trout’s big winter only loss is roomie

By Jon Heyman

Los Angeles Angels superstar Mike Trout, who had a huge offseason with three major positive occurrences (more on that below), will have to adjust to one new life reality, and it might not be as easy as he thinks: After getting married in the offseason (one of those three great occurrences; see below for how he ranks the three), he and best friend Garrett Richards will have to deal with no longer rooming together.

This is not a joke. Though Trout is the highest-paid player in the game and Richards also is obviously not poor, they have continued to live together for close to a decade, from A-ball to Double-A to Triple-A to the Angels, where the digs got considerably nicer.

They had a nice spot right by the beach in Laguna, one of the priciest plots of real estate in the United States, but for them the key was that they were together.

“People would look at us, and say, ‘This is weird. You guys make enough money to get your own places,’” Richards said. “But it worked. Everything was equal. Everything was balanced.”
That included one dog for each, by the way.

Richards, himself now married, moved a few miles north to Newport Beach. There is one big advantage to having a roomie in Southern Cal, of course, with the key one being the ability to ride in the carpool lane (and it’s quite a hike to Anaheim Stadium from Laguna, at least 40 minutes).

More remarkably, Trout reported they had no fights in their nearly 10 years together.

“We argue over sports,” Trout said. “He’s a Niners fan.”

Trout got the upper hand in that one this offseason when his beloved Eagles finally won the Super Bowl. You could see him on TV celebrating throughout all the playoff victories, but when I asked, Trout wisely ranked his three great winter changes this way:

1) Getting married; 2) all the Angels’ great acquisitions; and 3) the Eagles.

He also noted that his bride is a great Eagles fan, as well, as they grew up together in southern New Jersey.

Trout commented that, “The wedding was unbelievable.” And he sounded like a sage veteran when he said, “Happy wife – happy life.”

They went to the Eagles games together, and Trout commented, “It was great experiencing it in person.”

While he made his own key addition, obviously his team had a stellar offseason – adding the über-talented Shohei Ohtani plus Zack Cozart and Ian Kinsler while also retaining Justin Upton.

“Billy and the front office did a great job,” Trout remarked.

It’s already been a great year for Trout, but the moves put him in position to have a chance to make the playoffs for only the second time in his career. And that’s big, too.