



Clips

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**Angels look to maximize extra rest early for ace Garrett Richards**

By Pedro Moura

Across baseball, talent evaluators uniformly agree: Garrett Richards is the Angels' best starting pitcher. Given that he will pitch the 2017 season with an elbow regenerated by his own stem cells, he might also be the most uncertain.

The ordering of their remaining starters engenders more disagreement. Matt Shoemaker was the best a season ago. Tyler Skaggs was the biggest prospect on his way through the minors and may retain the most potential. Ricky Nolasco has been doing this the longest and might be the most dependable. Jesse Chavez has always been good in seasons' first halves.

Last December, manager Mike Scioscia called Richards the "lead dog" in his rotation, and described Shoemaker pitching "like a legitimate No. 1" for a 12-start stretch over the summer.

But neither man will draw the opening-day start on Monday night at the Oakland Coliseum. Instead, it'll be Nolasco. As the day approached, it was clear that Nolasco or Shoemaker would be the choice, but the Angels had ample time early in the spring to structure the rotation however they sought.

So, as opposing scouts have wondered for weeks now, why is Richards pitching third and not first? One reason: This way, his second scheduled start of the season will come with an extra day of rest, free of charge. Had he been first or second, he'd have to come back on regular rest.

Saturday, Scioscia insisted that was not the Angels' major motivation, while adding little clarity to any others.

"I think that's one peripheral positive that came from the way they lined up," the manager said. "I wouldn't say that's why we lined up that way. We wanted to make sure that these guys got to be where they needed to be. And if we had to push them back to the back end, we'd miss the first turn and they'd be ready.

"It was much easier to manage doing it this way than try to roll somebody forward when they weren't ready to."

Neither Shoemaker nor Richards missed a spring start. Neither demonstrated any signs of injury. Skaggs was skipped once because of shoulder weakness and treated carefully thereafter, but he has since been deemed fit to pitch Thursday in Oakland.

All the orchestration fosters some wonder: How capably can this grouping be managed this season? Among them, they've thrown 200 innings in a season only three times.

Scioscia said Nolasco has a chance to “really be a force for us in our rotation this year.” The coaching staff is encouraged by the two-month stretch he logged last summer after his acquisition from Minnesota.

Scioscia also repeated his declaration that Richards will not be throwing 115 pitches early in the season, as the 28-year-old right-hander volunteered when he arrived at spring training. But he declined to specify Richards’ restraints further.

“When you talk about 100 pitches, it’s always a natural benchmark,” Scioscia said. “He’s thrown more than that in games and been fine previously. The only thing I’m going to say about that is, yes, we’ve looked at some stuff under the circumstances. ... Whatever that range is gonna be, it’ll be a range where we feel it’s not going to be a risk, and he’s going to be able to bounce back from it.

“There are other things that we’re looking at other than just pitch count.”

Even on the back fields in spring training, the Angels monitored Richards’ velocity down to a decimal and, in revolutions per minute, his spin rate on every pitch. He excels in terms of spin. His natural manner of throwing has made it difficult for opponents to hit home runs, particularly off his breaking balls.

If his spin rate is decreasing within a game, it’s a good bet that he’s tiring. But it seems fair to say the Angels have not yet decided exactly how they will govern Richards this season.

“We want to see if there’s a safe pitch count range that becomes tangible,” Scioscia said, referencing pitchers who’ve returned from elbow injuries via non-surgical means. “Pitch counts, things that are public record, are shared. We see how guys can respond. Our medical staff has looked into some of those. [General manager] Billy Eppler’s looked into some of those.

“It’s gonna be common sense. We’re not gonna use extremes with a guy like Garrett.”

Nolasco is 34, in a potential contract year, and hoping to throw 202 1/3 innings to guarantee himself his \$13-million vesting option for next season. Perhaps he’ll push himself to his extremes.

Blake Parker is set for life in a fifth wheel regardless of whether he is on Angels roster

By Pedro Moura

The Angels must submit their season-opening 25-man roster to Major League Baseball by noon Sunday. Because he has struck out 17 consecutive batters, right-hander Blake Parker will be included on it.

Even if he was sent to triple-A Salt Lake instead, Parker knew where he would be sleeping: inside his new recreational vehicle. The 31-year-old journeyman reliever purchased a so-called fifth wheel last week in Phoenix, towed it to California when the Angels broke camp and kept it parked at Angel Stadium until he found out where to go. He scouted several locations across Orange County that have WiFi and pool access for his wife and stepson to enjoy.

“We’ll move it wherever we are,” he said.

Parker learned Saturday night at Dodger Stadium that he made the opening-day roster for the first time in his career. The Angels also added right-hander Bud Norris to their bullpen. To create space, they will designate for assignment right-handed relievers Austin Adams and Kirby Yates.

After an offseason spent working with weighted balls, Parker added nearly 2 mph to his fastball, carrying his velocity from average to interesting. He’s a curious type, completing crossword puzzles in clubhouses before games and asking Angels trainers for their opinion on the weighted baseballs.

Parker recently watched a documentary titled “Minimalism.” On the show, he said, they studied where residents spend time in their houses, using heat signatures. Almost all time at home is concentrated in one-quarter of the living space: the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom.

“The rest is just wasted space,” he said.

Parker makes his offseason residence in his home state of Arkansas, where he attended high school and college. He has lived in every corner of the country for his job the last few years after spending his first professional decade in the Chicago Cubs organization. He’s fed up with short-term rent costs and nonrefundable pet deposits at big-city apartments.

After going from New York to Anaheim to Milwaukee and back to Anaheim on the waiver wire over the offseason, he decided to make his life more mobile. And, he said, surprisingly comfortable.

“It’s not like we’re all in this one, little, tiny room,” Parker said. “It’s small, but it’s big enough. It helps to be able to pack up and take all your stuff, wherever you go. And then at the end of the year, I have this fifth wheel I can go camping in for a couple weeks, take a road trip.”

Parker struck out 24 batters in 12 1/3 spring innings. He logged a 0.73 earned-run average in 12 appearances.

Manager Mike Scioscia has long cautioned against overvaluing spring-training statistics, and he referenced that Saturday when discussing Parker and his strikeout streak.

“Those become hollow if they’re not backed up with other things that are going to be more tangible moving forward,” Scioscia said. “But if you’re asking me about Blake Parker, what he’s done so far is very real. It’s not like you have a guy that was effectively wild and you had guys that were not locked in at the beginning of spring swinging at pitches way out of the zone and all the sudden he’s punching out all these guys.

“His ability to repeat pitches has been very impressive. It allows him to get to good counts, where he’s managed to strike guys out.”

Short hops

Left-hander Tyler Skaggs will start Thursday afternoon in Oakland, he and Scioscia confirmed. That cements the Angels' season-opening starting rotation, which will begin with right-handers Ricky Nolasco, Matt Shoemaker and Garrett Richards. Right-hander Jesse Chavez, who started Saturday at Dodger Stadium, will follow Skaggs in Friday's home opener at Angel Stadium. ... Right-hander Vicente Campos will be put on the 10-day disabled list. Acquired off waivers in November, Campos was bothered by a nerve issue in his forearm during the spring. ... Asked whether there was any chance Albert Pujols would play first base during the four games in Oakland, Scioscia said, "No." The manager said Pujols could play the position in National League stadiums.

Freeway Series: Corey Seager collects two hits in Dodgers' 4-4 tie with the Angels

By Andy McCullough

Corey Seager did not play baseball for much of March. Sidelined with a sore oblique muscle, on some days his physical activity did not expand beyond the low intensity of riding an elliptical machine or walking on a treadmill. When he did appear in games, he played against minor league competition in a controlled, low-key environment.

While Seager idled, his Dodgers teammates laughed about his need to engage in the tedium of spring training. For a player like Seager, the National League rookie of the year in 2016 and third in the voting for most valuable player, the Cactus League offers far more risk than reward.

"Honestly," outfielder Scott Van Slyke said last month, "how many at-bats do you think Corey needs?"

In the Dodgers' 4-4 tie with the Angels at Dodger Stadium on Saturday night in the final game of the Freeway Series, his first appearance in a major league game since March 3, Seager offered evidence to explain the confidence of his peers.

He came to the plate in the bottom of the first inning. Seager gauged a fastball from former Dodger Jesse Chavez for a strike. When another fastball caught more of the plate, Seager redirected it into left field for an opposite-field single.

Two pitches later, Seager trotted around the bases on Justin Turner's home run. In his second at-bat, Seager hit another single. He left after five innings in the field. For Seager, the normal rules of rust do not apply.

"It's always nice to play with everybody," Seager said. "That's the only thing that you miss out on, not playing, getting to know everybody, getting back in the lineup with everybody, just feeling everything out."

On the latest tuneup before the start of the regular season, the Angels taxed Dodgers starter Brandon McCarthy for three runs in three innings.

Albert Pujols hit a majestic, two-run home run in the third inning. The Dodgers chased Chavez in the fourth inning.

Joc Pederson gave the Dodgers the lead with a two-run home run against Andrew Bailey. The Angels manufactured a comeback against minor league pitcher Michael Johnson in the ninth inning, when catcher Tony Sanchez hit a run-scoring double to tie the score.

With Seager back, manager Dave Roberts could unveil his full lineup for the first time in weeks. After using second baseman Logan Forsythe as the leadoff hitter for much of the spring, Roberts dropped Forsythe into the fifth position in the lineup and put outfielder Andrew Toles at the top of the order.

The shifts did not stem from disappointment in Forsythe. He entered Saturday's game batting .360. Roberts felt Toles, who hit .340 as a rookie in 2016, could handle the leadoff assignment against left-handed pitchers, while Forsythe could help break up a rut of left-handed hitters in the middle of the group.

In Roberts' proposed lineup, first baseman Adrian Gonzalez would bat fourth, with Pederson and Yasmani Grandal slated behind him. Gonzalez and Pederson bat left-handed.

Although Grandal is a switch-hitter, he has a more proficient history as a left-handed swinger. So the presence of Forsythe, a right-handed batter, would prevent an opposing manager from using a left-handed reliever to wipe out a third of Roberts' lineup.

Roberts also mentioned the idea of "protection" for Gonzalez.

"All these different variables play into it, absolutely," Roberts said.

On Saturday, the lineup stayed quiet, save for Turner's early blast and Pederson's sixth homer of the spring several innings later.

The Dodgers fell behind in the third inning, when an in-game experiment by McCarthy went awry.

With Pujols at the plate and a runner at first, McCarthy tried to change the shape of his cut fastball.

Looking to "do more with" the pitch, he explained, he left the ball hanging over the heart of the plate. Pujols crushed it.

"It's something that over time, I'll keep playing with," McCarthy said. "In that situation, it's not a pitch you throw him after you've thrown it three times. I tried to do it on the fly, and it really did not work."

By the sixth inning, Roberts sent in substitutes for the left side of his infield.

Seager has played nine innings only once this spring. He completed that assignment earlier this week, after the Dodgers had left town for the start of the Freeway Series.

An injury-interrupted camp is nothing new for Seager. He missed a significant chunk of last spring, too, after he injured a knee. He required a few weeks to find his groove during the regular season, before catching fire in May. Seager hoped to avoid any April hiccups in 2017.

“You hope that it doesn’t keep happening,” Seager said. “It’s one of those things where I got ABs down in the minor leagues.

“I got everything that I needed. So hopefully it turns out well.”

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

17 things to watch for with the 2017 Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND — A winter of speculation and crystal ball gazing is finally coming to an end.

The 2017 Angels, up to now just an aggregation of projections and hopes, on Monday night in Oakland will start playing real games, producing real numbers that will forever be recorded on the backs of baseball cards. Remember those?

Although most of the experts don’t give the Angels much chance of reaching the playoffs, the Angels obviously feel otherwise.

And between now and the time when we learn who is right, there will be plenty to watch. Questions, storylines and just fun stuff.

A look at 17 things to watch in ’17 begins with the obvious ...

1. Mike Trout: Did you expect anything else? He is the best player in baseball, and he’s almost mind-numbingly consistent. Trout’s elite seasons are so similar to one another that you sometimes need to dig deep to find something worth discussing besides, “Wow, he’s good.” Barring injury, there is no reason to expect anything different this year. Hey, maybe he’ll finally do the Home Run Derby, though.
2. Albert Pujols at 591 homers: Don’t forget Pujols, who might not be the best player on his own team any more but remains one of the best players in the history of the game. He is creeping up on 600 homers, which is a remarkable accomplishment, regardless of what anyone thinks of his current production in relation to his salary.
3. Garrett Richards, medical miracle: About 10 months ago, Richards was believed to be headed for Tommy John surgery that would have likely knocked him out of nearly two full seasons. But, stem-cell therapy seems to have worked, and here he is. How the Angels handle him remains to be seen. Certainly, there are going to be games when he’s dominating, but reaches 100 pitches and comes out. And the Angels might even lose some of those games after he’s done. It is going to be a Thing, for sure.

4. The arm, part I: Andrelton Simmons showed Angels fans in his first year that his glove is as impressive as advertised, but his arm is just as exciting. Simmons not only catches balls that other shortstops don't, but he makes throws that other shortstops don't, stealing outs.
5. The arm, part II: If you aren't familiar with Martin Maldonado — considering he's spent his career as a backup catcher in the other league, no one could blame you — you are about to see a player considered to have the best arm of any catcher in the majors. And Maldonado loves to show it off, often picking behind runners in addition to the throws when they try to steal.
6. Speed: It's no secret that Mike Scioscia likes teams that have the personnel to be aggressive on the bases, and he's got it this year. The Angels upgraded their speed in left, with Cameron Maybin and Ben Revere, and at second, with Danny Espinosa. They ran frequently in spring training, including hit-and-runs.
7. Improving farm system: If the Angels are to become consistent winners again, they will need to get production out of their farm system. It's still relatively thin. If some of their prospects from recent drafts (outfielder Jahmai Jones, first baseman Matt Thaiss, catcher Taylor Ward) and some of the prospects who broke out last year (reliever Keynan Middleton, outfielder Michael Hermosillo) can continue looking good, the system will be in much better shape.
8. The draft: The Angels will have the 10th pick in the June draft, providing a good opportunity to add an impact player to their farm system. It will be important that they find good players throughout the draft, though, in order to replenish the system.
9. The trading deadline: If the Angels are out of it in July, buzzards will be circling around their roster looking to pick off some of the impending free agents. Maybin, Revere, Espinosa and Yunel Escobar are all free agents at the end of the season, and Ricky Nolasco and Huston Street have options. If things are really dire, the Angels might have to consider trading Richards, who is a free agent after the 2018 season. If the Angels are contenders and need to add, they'll have to decide which of their few attractive prospects they could move.
10. Tyler Skaggs' innings: Skaggs missed all of the 2015 season and half of the 2016 season after having Tommy John surgery and subsequent shoulder trouble. Skaggs last threw 150 innings in 2011, in the low minors. The Angels still think he can be a high-end starting pitcher, though. If he is pitching well, it will be interesting to see how much of his performance the Angels are willing to sacrifice to manage his innings.
11. Nolasco's innings: If Nolasco throws 202-1/3 innings this season, his option will become a player option, meaning he could choose to stay with the Angels for \$13 million in 2018.
12. The first base shuffle: When Luis Valbuena comes off the disabled list in late April or early May, the Angels could finally face the dilemma that his injury delayed. How will they split the time between Valbuena and C.J. Cron? Cron has shown flashes, and good power, but he's streaky and sometimes

lacks discipline. Valbuena might be a better pure hitter and better defender, but he isn't likely to play against lefties.

13. Escobar's mental errors: Last season, Escobar had a few moments when he appeared to have mental lapses, like forgetting how many outs there were or failing to run out ground balls. The Angels never benched him, perhaps because they weren't deep enough to have anyone to replace him. Now, they have Valbuena to play third if Escobar has any issues.

14. The lottery tickets: The Angels have collected a group of former top prospects who so far haven't panned out. They invested little in them, but hope to get a big return out of at least one of them. The leader of this group is Alex Meyer, a 6-foot-9, hard-throwing right-hander who will start the season at Triple-A. They also have pitchers Manny Banuelos and John Lamb, infielder Dustin Ackley and catcher Tony Sanchez.

15. Can Cam? The Angels will start the season with untested Cam Bedrosian at closer. He has the stuff and the lineage — his father Steve was a Cy Young-winning closer — but he spent just a few days as a big league closer last year before he got hurt. If Bedrosian can hold down the job all season, giving the Angels a young, cost-controlled, reliable closer, it will be an important piece to the puzzle.

16. Bullpen management: Among the relievers who will lead up to the closer, the Angels have multiple pitchers who can get four to six outs with a lead. They aren't the typical multi-inning mop up men. That could give Scioscia the freedom to shorten games even more than usual. It also might tempt him to overuse his relievers and pull his starters too quickly. Either way, it will bear watching.

17. Catcher competition: Despite the fact the Angels traded for Maldonado and love his defense, his offensive history is spotty, which could lead to a season-long competition with Carlos Perez. Both are good defensively, so it will be an ongoing evaluation of which is providing the better combination of offense and defense.

Dodgers, Angels tie in final exhibition game

By J.P. Hoornstra

LOS ANGELES -- There is no ramping up to baseball's regular season. The final exhibition game does not count in the standings; the next one does.

A 4-4 tie between the Dodgers and Angels in the final Freeway Series game Saturday did not count, and Dodgers pitcher Brandon McCarthy took full advantage. He served up a monstrous home run to Albert Pujols in the third inning, then later brushed it off as a something of a mad science experiment.

"I was trying to actually do more with the cutter," McCarthy said. "I tried to change the shape of it, turn it into a pitch that could be a swing-and-miss pitch. It's something that over time I'll keep playing with, see if there's -- in that situation that's not a pitch you throw him after you've thrown three. I tried to do it on the fly and it really did not work.

“I tried something new. It’s not something to be tried again.”

Now, the time for tinkering is over.

The Dodgers host the San Diego Padres on Monday. The Angels will fly north to play the Oakland A’s. If the pitchers’ grips, the signs from the third base coach, and the hitters’ walk-up songs haven’t been perfected, it’s too late.

The Angels scored a run in the ninth inning Saturday to forge a 4-4 tie. They finished the preseason 20-14-1, the Dodgers 18-17-2. Both teams claimed a win in the Freeway Series, going 1-1-1.

In the finale, Pujols, Justin Turner and Joc Pederson homered before the announced crowd of 39,411 at Dodger Stadium.

Turner went 3 for 3, finishing spring training with a .418 batting average and five home runs. Pederson and Yasiel Puig each went 2 for 3 for the Dodgers.

McCarthy allowed three runs in three innings. Brandon Morrow (one inning), Steve Geltz (one), Yaisel Sierra (two) and Madison Younginer (one) did not allow a run in relief.

Angels starter Jesse Chavez allowed seven hits in 3 1/3 innings, but didn’t allow a run other than Turner’s two-run blast in the first inning. Chavez did not walk a batter and struck out two.

Angels relievers JC Ramirez (two-thirds), Jose Alvarez (one), Jose Valdez (1 1/3) and Deolis Guerra (one) didn’t allow a run in relief. Joc Pederson hit a two-run home run against Angels pitcher Andrew Bailey in the sixth inning, erasing a 3-2 deficit.

With Dodgers minor leaguer Michael Johnson on the mound in the ninth inning, the Angels tied the game 4-4.

Johnson allowed a one-out single to Rey Navarro and walked Cliff Pennington. The next batter, Tony Sanchez, doubled to left field to score Navarro with the tying run. With Ben Revere at the plate, Pennington took a long lead off third base. The Dodgers’ catcher, minor leaguer Will Smith, threw down to third base and Pennington was caught in a rundown.

Pennington nearly got out of the pickle, which was executed less than perfectly. But Johnson tagged out Pennington at home plate to deny the Angels the go-ahead run. Angels manager Mike Scioscia discussed the call with the umpire crew, to no avail.

Angels reliever Parker makes most of chance after uncertain winter

By Elliot Teaford

LOS ANGELES - Blake Parker's phone never stopped ringing during the offseason. The Angels selected him off waivers from the New York Yankees in October. The Milwaukee Brewers selected him off waivers from the Angels in November. The Angels selected him off waivers from the Brewers in

December.

Parker paid little attention.

As long as the right-handed reliever had a job, he was determined to stick to his offseason routine. He kept working. He kept "going about my business," as he put it Saturday. There was no need to worry, no need for family and friends to be concerned.

"I wasn't bouncing from city to city," Parker said before the Angels faced the Dodgers in the Freeway Series finale at Dodger Stadium. "I was at the house. I was in Arkansas. I just went about my business. You go about your business the same way no matter what team you're on."

Parker's determination paid off in a big way as the Angels appeared set to reward him for his standout spring performance with a spot on their 25-man roster. Parker was in position to earn a place in their bullpen for their season-opening series starting Monday in Oakland.

"What he's done so far is very real," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

What the 31-year-old did was go on a strikeout binge over the final days of spring training, taking a streak in which he retired 17 batters in a row via strikeouts into Saturday, an eye-catching showing that gave him a chance to stay in one place for 2017.

Parker is grateful, pleased to wear a major league uniform for as long as possible. The flurry of offseason transactions could have troubled him, but he saw it another way. He figured it was nice to be wanted. If the phone didn't ring, then he would have been worried.

"Bouncing around this season, going from team to team, it was really kind of uplifting to have interest from multiple teams and made me feel wanted and made feel I could prove something in the spring," he said. "My whole career I've been trying to prove something not only to myself but to everybody. That's what I wanted to do, try to prove something, prove that I can get it done."

Plus, it wasn't as if he had to pack up and actually move from one city to another to another.

"I was just at home working out or sitting on my couch," he said, laughing at the memory.

Richards watch

Garrett Richards' ability to throw his fastball in the high 90-mph range during the spring was enough for the Angels to be optimistic about his recovery from a damaged elbow ligament that was treated with stem-cell therapy rather than the more traditional Tommy John surgery.

Scioscia said the Angels aren't going to put too much stress on Richards' valuable right arm, though. So, don't expect Richards to throw 115 pitches, or even 100, when the season begins and he takes his place as the No. 3 starter to open the season.

"I think I've had enough time to think about how I want to go about this season after missing all of last year," Richards said. "I just feel really comfortable with where I am right now delivery-wise and my mentality. I'm just happy where I'm at right now."

Trout documentary

MLB Network will show the documentary "Mike Trout: Millville to MVP" at 5 p.m. today/on Sunday, chronicling the center fielder's rise from a small town in southern New Jersey to the major league superstardom. The one-hour program highlights Trout's connection to his hometown roots.

The documentary features video and photos from Trout's youth baseball and high school games, plus interviews with Scioscia, Richards and Angels right fielder Kole Calhoun. Trout's parents, Jeff and Debbie, and high school coach Roy Hallenbeck also are interviewed.

FROM ANGELS.COM**Nolasco, Graveman open season in AL West clash**

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

The Angels and A's, longtime rivals in the American League West, have ground to make up in the division as 2017 begins.

It's therefore fitting that they'll meet as the bell rings in Oakland Coliseum on Monday night, April 3, for Opening Day.

While both teams finished '16 with losing records and well out of the chase for the postseason, there are plenty of reasons for fans to get excited about what might happen this time around.

For the Angels, it starts with the reigning AL MVP in center field, Mike Trout. Trout is widely considered the best player in the game, he's already won two MVPs and was second in the voting for that award three times in his first five full MLB seasons, and he's about to enter his age-25 year.

In other words, that's a good piece of the puzzle to start with.

"He never takes a pitch off," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "He can change a game at any point. Not many guys in baseball can do that. He can change it with his glove. He can change it with charging a ball and stopping a first-and-third [situation] on the defensive side, and obviously on the basepaths, you see the way he applies his speed there. And the obvious thing is in the batter's box. He's a game-changer there."

The Angels added some thump to their roster in the offseason, but it's their pitching that could ultimately tell the tale of 2017. Their starting rotation was decimated by injury practically before '16 even began. Those pitchers are looking better heading into this season, but a relative newcomer to Los Angeles will get the ball first Monday in Oakland.

Right-hander Ricky Nolasco will make the fourth Opening Day start of his career for the third different club, following previous appearances for the Marlins ('09, '13) and Twins ('14). The veteran pitched well for the Angels after he was acquired along with Alex Meyer from the Twins in exchange for Hector Santiago last August, recording a 3.21 ERA over his last 11 starts. The Angels hope Nolasco can continue the momentum he has built up this spring in the Cactus League, where he posted a solid 3.52 ERA over four starts.

"As we got through camp and considering how well Ricky is throwing the ball, how well he finished last year for us, where Shoe was and [with] Garrett coming back from his injury, I think Ricky will handle the Opening Day hoopla and go out there and hopefully give us a good chance to win," said Scioscia.

On the Oakland side, the '17 season will be about young players with talent and how quickly that can mature into big league success.

While ace Sonny Gray sits on the sidelines for the time being with a lat strain, the A's will turn the ball over to right-hander Kendall Graveman on Opening Day, and Graveman will be followed by young starters Sean Manaea and Jharel Cotton.

"When [A's manager Bob Melvin] told me I was going to be out there on Opening Day, I said, 'I'm the No. 1 starter on Opening Night, but then whoever is the second guy is the No. 1 starter for us the next night,'" Graveman said. "That's the way we have to go about it to be successful, and I think that's the way we will."

And that could be the key for the '17 A's: an attitude built on high expectations that could lead to some serious surprises.

"It's anyone's game," Oakland catcher Stephen Vogt said recently. "You never know what's going to happen. That's the beauty of it. Everyone's goal going into Spring Training is to win the World Series. If it's not, you're coming for the wrong reason."

Three things to know about this game

- Trout has finished in the top two in MVP voting in each of the last five seasons, joining Barry Bonds (2000-04) as the only players to accomplish the feat.
- The A's have lost 11 of their last 12 openers and are 5-18 in the first game of the season dating back to 1994.
- A's closer Ryan Madson saved a team-leading 30 games in his first season with Oakland last year to become just the second A's pitcher over the last 10 years to save 30 or more games (Grant Balfour, 38, in '13).

Parker, Norris last two added to roster

By Chad Thornburg / MLB.com

LOS ANGELES -- The Angels put the finishing touches on their Opening Day roster Saturday evening after wrapping their spring exhibition slate with a 4-4 tie in the Freeway Series finale against the Dodgers. While much of the roster was already in place, there were two vacancies in the bullpen, which will be filled by non-roster invitees Bud Norris and Blake Parker, the club announced.

Relief candidates Kirby Yates and Austin Adams were designated for assignment. Right-handers Vicente Campos and Huston Street, left-hander Andrew Heaney and infielder Luis Valbuena were placed on the 10-day disabled list (retroactive to March 30), while righty Nick Tropeano landed on the 60-day DL.

"A lot of tough decisions this spring," manager Mike Scioscia said, "but we're really comfortable that those guys are going to give us the depth we're going to need in our 'pen."

Parker, claimed off waivers from the Brewers in December, pitched his way into a roster spot this spring, posting a 0.73 ERA with 24 strikeouts through 12 1/3 innings.

"What he's done so far is very real," Scioscia said. "His ability to repeat pitches has been very impressive."

Parker ended exhibition play on a high note with each of his last 17 outs coming via strikeout, longer than any such streak in the regular season since 1974, per STATS LLC.

"It feels good to finish spring on a strong note," Parker said. "Hopefully it carries over to the season, one way or another. I'm not trying to do anything different, not trying to do anything more. Just staying with the program and keep pitching."

Norris, who split time between the Dodgers and Braves last season, signed a Minor League deal with the Angels in early February and compiled a 2.70 ERA through 13 1/3 innings this spring. He competed for a spot in the starting rotation, but will now fill a long relief role, joining Parker, Cam Bedrosian, Andrew Bailey, JC Ramirez, Yusmeiro Petit and Jose Alvarez in the seven-man bullpen.

"We're excited about the makeup in our bullpen because I think it's going to be multi-dimensional," Scioscia said. "I think we're going to have guys that will go out there and give us the functional length, not just the guys who are going to eat innings. These guys are going to give us the four to six outs to hold leads and pitch in high leverage situations. I think they fit our 'pen right now."

The starting rotation of Ricky Nolasco, who received the Opening Day nod, Matt Shoemaker, Garrett Richards, Tyler Skaggs and Jesse Chavez completes the pitching staff.

Position players include catchers Martin Maldonado and Carlos Perez, infielders C.J. Cron, Yunel Escobar, Danny Espinosa, Jefry Marte, Cliff Pennington, Albert Pujols and Andrelton Simmons and outfielders Mike Trout, Kole Calhoun, Cameron Maybin and Ben Revere.

Sinker helped Nolasco to career revival

By Maria Guardado / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- The Angels didn't come into Spring Training set on naming right-hander Ricky Nolasco their Opening Day starter, but as camp wore on, a confluence of factors led them to that decision.

Nolasco wasn't facing any health concerns, unlike the Halos' top two starters, Garrett Richards and Matt Shoemaker, who are both coming off injuries. With three Opening Day starts already under his belt, manager Mike Scioscia also believed Nolasco would be unfazed by the pomp and circumstance that typically accompany the inaugural game of a season.

But just as important was the fact that Nolasco has been pitching very well for the Angels ever since his acquisition from the Twins last summer.

At the time of the trade, which also brought Alex Meyer to Anaheim in exchange for Hector Santiago, Nolasco had a 5.13 ERA over 21 starts in Minnesota. But the 34-year-old veteran, who grew up in nearby

Rialto, experienced a bit of a renaissance after returning to Southern California, logging a 3.21 ERA in 11 starts with the Angels.

Nolasco has said he believes an increased reliance on his sinker has been the primary impulse behind his turnaround.

Pitching coach Charles Nagy pitched that idea to him shortly after he landed in Anaheim, and the results have been tangible. Last July, Nolasco's final month with the Twins, he threw his sinker 21.94 percent of the time, according to data from Brooks Baseball.

By September, that figure had climbed to 33.88 percent, an 11.94 percent spike from just two months earlier. By using his sinker more often, Nolasco was able to induce more ground balls and generate quicker outs, improving his effectiveness.

"It's something they wanted me to do when I got here, and it paid off obviously," Nolasco said earlier this spring. "It's an adjustment I made and will continue to make and getting better."

Nolasco has continued to lean on his sinker this spring and has produced solid results, going 1-1 with a 3.52 ERA with 10 strikeouts over 15 1/3 Cactus League innings. He'll look to carry that success over to the regular season when he takes the mound against the A's in Oakland on Monday.

It will mark Nolasco's fourth career Opening Day start. He previously received the nod in 2009 and 2013 with the Marlins and in 2014 with the Twins.

"It's a great honor, it means a lot," Nolasco said Thursday. "I'm going to do everything I can to try to come home with a win."

Analyzing the Halos' Opening Day roster

By Maria Guardado

ANAHEIM -- With Opening Day right around the corner, the Angels' 25-man roster was finalized late Saturday, as there were a few decisions that came down to the wire.

The Angels settled on relievers Blake Parker and Bud Norris to round out the bullpen after a 4-4 tie against the Dodgers in the Freeway Series on Saturday.

Here's a final look at the 25-man roster in advance of Monday's opener in Oakland:

Catcher: Martin Maldonado, Carlos Perez

Not much has changed on the catching front for the Angels, who appear ready to open the season with Maldonado as their primary catcher. Maldonado, acquired from the Brewers over the offseason, has impressed the club with his defense, particularly the strength of his throwing arm, and entered Friday having started four of the last five exhibition games. He will split time behind the plate with Perez, who unveiled a revamped swing this spring and also figures to draw plenty of starts.

First base: C.J. Cron

Cron came into camp fighting for playing time with free-agent addition Luis Valbuena, but Valbuena suffered a strained right hamstring on March 22 and will be sidelined for 4-6 weeks. The injury opened the door for Cron to begin the season as the Angels' starting first baseman, a role he filled last season. Cron, 27, has enjoyed a strong spring at the plate and entered Friday batting .314 with four home runs and 11 RBIs.

Second base: Danny Espinosa

Espinosa remains on track to start at second base, plugging one of the Angels' key holes from last year. Espinosa, a Santa Ana native, was acquired from the Nationals over the winter and is slated to be a free agent at the end of the season.

Shortstop: Andrelton Simmons

Simmons has been slowed by lower back tightness, but he said he could play through it if it were the regular season. Barring any setbacks, Simmons will start at shortstop and team up with Espinosa to form a formidable double-play combination.

Third base: Yunel Escobar

Escobar missed some time this spring with an abdominal issue, but he now appears healthy and ready to serve as the Angels' everyday third baseman and leadoff hitter.

Designated hitter: Albert Pujols

There was some question as to whether Pujols would be available for the start of the season following his December foot surgery, which called for a four-month recovery, but the 37-year-old slugger progressed well and is now projected to be in the Angels' Opening Day lineup. Pujols has not played the field this spring, but he's been participating in defensive drills and could occasionally see time at first base.

Utility: Cliff Pennington, Jefry Marte

Pennington had been expected to start the season as a reserve middle infielder, but Marte appeared to lose his spot on the Angels' 25-man roster when they signed Valbuena in January. Still, Valbuena's injury created an opening for Marte to break camp with the Major League team as a bench player. Marte will likely back up the corner infield spots, though he also has limited experience playing left field.

Outfield: Mike Trout, Cameron Maybin, Kole Calhoun, Ben Revere

Revere's hot spring, coupled with Maybin's cold start, sparked questions about whether the Angels would consider starting Revere in left field over Maybin. But Scioscia said Maybin's starting job is safe, though that could presumably change if Revere continues to produce off the bench. Overall, the Angels are projected to have a fast and dynamic outfield, with Trout in center, Maybin in left and Calhoun in right.

Starting pitching: Garrett Richards, Matt Shoemaker, Tyler Skaggs, Ricky Nolasco, Jesse Chavez

The Angels' fifth-starter competition was never that close, as Chavez pitched well all spring and has likely assured himself of a starting role, though nothing is official yet. Skaggs will open the season in the

Angels' rotation after bouncing back well from his Minor League start against the Giants Thursday. Skaggs will make his next start on April 6 against the A's in Oakland.

Bullpen: Cam Bedrosian, Andrew Bailey, Ramirez, Yusmeiro Petit, Jose Alvarez, Bud Norris and Blake Parker

Huston Street will start the season on the disabled list with a strained right lat, so Bedrosian is expected to open the season as the Angels' closer, with Bailey likely serving as the setup man. The Angels converted Ramirez into a starter this spring, and the 28-year-old performed well in the new role, but he'll likely have a hard time cracking the rotation and seems more likely to wind up in the bullpen. Petit came into camp as a non-roster invitee but earned a spot on the team after recording a 0.64 ERA over 14 innings. Norris, who has posted a 2.92 ERA over 12 1/3 innings, did the same. Alvarez seems like a good bet to make the bullpen as the only left-handed reliever left in camp. The final spot, however, remains tough to predict. Parker, claimed off waivers from the Brewers, made a strong case for himself after recording a 0.79 ERA over 11 1/3 innings, with his last 14 outs coming via strikeout.

Pujols warms up for Opening Day with HR

By Ken Gurnick

LOS ANGELES -- Joc Pederson and Justin Turner homered Saturday night for the Dodgers, but pinch-hitter Tony Sanchez's RBI double in the top of the ninth inning gave the Angels a 4-4 tie at Dodger Stadium and a split of the three-game Freeway Series.

Pederson's sixth home run of the Spring came in the sixth inning off Andrew Bailey after pinch-hitter Chase Utley walked and stole second base.

Albert Pujols slugged a two-run homer for the Angels in the third inning off Brandon McCarthy, who won the fourth starter role for the Dodgers coming off two years of injuries. McCarthy was charged with three runs on four hits with four strikeouts in three innings.

"I was happy with it," said McCarthy. "I was able to execute across the board. I tried something new with Pujols, tried to do something more with the cutter, not something I'll try again when games count."

In the bottom of the first inning, Turner hammered a two-run homer off Angels starter Jesse Chavez, who pitched for the Dodgers last year. The home run -- one of three hits for Turner -- followed the first of two singles by Rookie of the Year Corey Seager, playing in his first Cactus League game since straining an oblique muscle on March 3.

Chavez pitched 3 1/3 innings, allowing two runs on seven hits, in his final exhibition start. He said the hits he surrendered were the result of too much side-to-side movement and a lack of depth on his pitches, something he plans to address before making his season debut Friday in the Angels' home opener against the Mariners.

"We all have a to-do list [for spring]," Chavez said. "All the boxes were checked, and I think we're ready to rock."

After Sanchez's tying double, the Angels had the potential go-ahead run in the ninth inning thrown out at the plate on a missed squeeze sign that was recorded as a caught stealing at the end of a bungled rundown.

The Dodgers finished the Cactus League 18-18-2, while the Angels went 20-14-1.

Angels Up Next: The Angels begin the 2017 season against their American League West rivals in Oakland. Right-hander Ricky Nolasco will make the fourth Opening Day start of his career when he toes the rubber vs. Kendall Graveman and the A's at 7:05 p.m. PT in a game on MLB.TV.

Dodgers Up Next: Clayton Kershaw makes his seventh consecutive Opening Day start on Monday against the Padres in a 1:10 p.m. game at Dodger Stadium in a game on MLB.TV. The game will mark the regular-season Dodgers debut of new second baseman Logan Forsythe.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Underdog A's, Angels open with high hopes

OAKLAND, Calif. -- It was just three seasons ago that the Los Angeles Angels won the American League West and the Oakland A's finished second, earning a wild-card playoff berth.

Since then, the A's have owned the West's cellar with 68 wins in 2015 and 69 in 2016. The Angels, meanwhile, sank to third place in 2015 and fourth last year, when they went 74-88 and finished 21 games behind the first-place Texas Rangers, who won their second division title in a row.

The A's and Angels will face each other Monday on Opening Night at the Oakland Coliseum in the first game of a four-game series. Both teams appear to be long shots to challenge the Rangers, Houston Astros or Seattle Mariners for the division crown. Yet the A's and Angels are optimistic they can reverse course and make playoff runs after two rough seasons.

"Nothing better than Opening Day," A's catcher Stephen Vogt said. "It's a national holiday, or should be. Everybody's in the same spot in the standings. Everybody's got a chance to win the World Series, and we feel no different. We have some of the best fans in baseball. Oakland fans love us and we love them. We're going to give them a good team to cheer for this year."

The A's added three new starters to their lineup during the offseason, signing third baseman Trevor Plouffe, right fielder Matt Joyce and center fielder Rajai Davis, who played for Oakland from 2008-2010.

The Angels added four new starters: second baseman Danny Espinosa, catcher Martin Maldonado, left fielder Cameron Maybin and first baseman Luis Valbuena, who will open the season on the disabled list due to a hamstring injury.

"You just look around the clubhouse and we improved in a lot of spots," Angels right fielder Kole Calhoun told the Orange County Register. "That gets me excited."

Of course, having two-time and reigning American League MVP Mike Trout in center field is another reason for the Angels to be optimistic. Trout hit .315 with 29 home runs, 100 RBIs and 123 runs last season.

With Sonny Gray (right lat strain) on the disabled list, A's right-hander Kendall Graveman will make his first career Opening Day start. Graveman turned out to be the Athletics' best and most reliable starter in a young rotation last year when Gray battled multiple injuries. Graveman made 31 starts and finished 10-11 with a 4.11 ERA.

"You can't speak enough about what he did last year," Vogt said. "He made every start. He stepped up for us. The second half he really kind of came into his own and realized, 'Holy cow, look how good I can be when I stick to what I do best.' He really took ownership of what he strives in doing and has been very, very consistent. I'm excited to see what he can do this year."

The Angels will counter with right-hander Ricky Nolasco, who will make his fourth career Opening Day start. He started on Opening Day for the Minnesota Twins in 2014 and for the Miami Marlins in 2009 and 2013.

Angels manager Mike Scioscia chose Nolasco over two more high-profile candidates, Garrett Richards and Mike Shoemaker. But Richards missed most of last season with an elbow injury and underwent stem cell treatments to repair damage to his ulnar collateral ligament. Shoemaker's season was cut short when he was hit in the head by a line drive on Sept. 4 against the Seattle Mariners and underwent surgery. He went 0-1 with a 5.29 in five Cactus League starts.

Nolasco went 1-1 with a 3.52 ERA in four spring starts. He was 4-6 with a 3.21 ERA in 11 starts last season after being traded by Minnesota to the Angels on Aug. 1.

"I think Ricky will handle the Opening Day hoopla," Scioscia said. "I think he'll go out there and give us a chance to win."

Nolasco is 3-2 with a 3.38 ERA in seven career starts against the A's. Graveman is 1-1 with a 3.38 ERA in six career starts against the Angels.