



Clips

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES**Angels rally in the ninth inning for first win of the season**

By Pedro Moura

Cornered in an 0-and-2 count against a man who had struck him out 24 hours earlier, Danny Espinosa reconsidered his strategy in Tuesday's ninth inning at the Oakland Coliseum.

He told himself to wait on Ryan Dull's next pitch, maybe try to "play pepper" with it. When it was a slider that floated over the plate, Espinosa pounced and sent the baseball soaring through the night. Improbably, he provided the Angels a comeback victory over Oakland 7-6 for their first win of 2017, and his first hit as an Angel. It salvaged Matt Shoemaker's return to a major league mound and erased the team's first bullpen blowup.

"To be able to come through for the team is the best feeling," Espinosa said.

In his first start of 2017, Shoemaker's goal was to behave the same way he always had. Seven months since he was helped off the field in Seattle because of a 105-mph line drive to the temple, he wanted to be unafraid in his attacking of the opposition and steadfast in his reliance on his split-finger fastball.

The lone exception, he said before he took the Oakland Coliseum mound, was he would not take off his hat as much, so as not to disturb the carbon-fiber protective piece hidden within. And, no, he said, his decision to wear protection was not on order from his wife, Danielle.

"The good thing is that she really doesn't mind," Shoemaker said. "She was like, 'You've got a titanium plate in there. You're probably good if it hits the same spot. Hopefully it never does.'"

At that, he grinned. Yes, he acknowledged, "It makes her feel a little bit better. At the same time, the cool thing is she didn't really mind either way."

So Shoemaker stepped up, reared back and delivered a 93-mph fastball down the middle, taken for a strike by Rajai Davis. He retired Davis and Matt Joyce, and then left a 2-and-2 fastball up to Ryon Healy, higher than he hoped. Healy hit it 420 feet to center field.

In the Angels' half of the second inning, Jefry Marte worked a one-out walk, Cameron Maybin singled and Andrelton Simmons singled. The bases were loaded for Espinosa, who popped out to short right field, but Martin Maldonado followed with a single into right, scoring two runs. Yunel Escobar soon singled into left to score another. The Angels had a two-run lead, and added another run on a Mike Trout fifth-inning triple.

In the bottom of the second, Shoemaker left a 3-and-2 splitter up, and Jed Lowrie hit it out to right field. He retired the next two hitters, then issued another two-out walk, but Maldonado successfully back-picked the baserunner, shortstop Marcus Semien.

Shoemaker threw 25 pitches in the first, 23 in the second, and 16 in the third, which passed briskly because Maldonado threw out Davis, who had tried to steal second after a single. Crouching down, Shoemaker said he heard the ball whiz by him on its way to second base. Maldonado's throw from his knees was clocked at 87 mph.

"That's nice to have," Shoemaker said.

In the fourth, Stephen Vogt led off with a liner back up the middle. It was clocked at 74 mph, not the 105 mph that threatened Shoemaker's career. Still, the pitcher flinched and protected his head, consciously or unconsciously.

"I thought it was already going to be there, and it was still getting there," Shoemaker said. "Replaying that moment, I just remember reacting to it."

The ball snaked past him, and Simmons fielded it for an easy out.

Shoemaker next allowed a double to Lowrie, but pitched out of the jam and set down the Athletics in order in the fifth, his final inning. He threw 99 pitches, walked three Athletics, and struck out four.

It was an unremarkable but capable return. Right-hander Blake Parker handled the sixth but encountered trouble when asked to pitch the seventh. Soon, manager Mike Scioscia replaced him with Bud Norris, pitching for the second consecutive day for just the sixth time in his career. A double, a triple, and an Espinosa error put the A's ahead 6-4.

Then Marte and Maybin singled, Espinosa capped the Angels' rally, and Cam Bedrosian recorded his second career save.

The Angels' Garrett Richards chose injection treatments, not surgery, and now he's back

By Pedro Moura

Last May, Angels pitchers Andrew Heaney and Garrett Richards each received stem-cell injections, hoping to regenerate the ligaments in their elbows that had ripped and prevented them from pitching.

Heaney went first, and he gave Richards a rundown of what to expect, including one important piece of information.

"Make sure you bring your credit card," he told Richards. "You gotta pay for it."

Until then, Richards had not thought about the cost of the procedure. He assumed it'd be covered by the team that employed him, like every other operation he'd had in his seven years as a professional ballplayer.

"You'd think so, right?" Richards said. "But in the big scheme of things, I looked at it like, 'OK, this is totally worth it possibly working.' To me, it was invaluable. If it could work, I probably would've paid twice, maybe three times as much, as I already did."

He remembers it cost about \$3,000. He then received a supplementary platelet-rich plasma injection in October, which the club covered. Stem-cell injections requiring out-of-pocket payment are a quirk of Major League Baseball. Angels physician Steve Yoon, who performed the injections on Heaney and Richards, said NFL, NHL and NBA teams all cover the cost of the procedure.

For Heaney, it did not take, and he underwent elbow reconstruction surgery in July. But Richards will make his first start of 2017 on Wednesday against Oakland. Yoon has pronounced him fully recovered and healthy.

“The changes are dramatic under imaging,” Yoon said in a phone interview.

Considering those changes and the severity of the initial tear, Yoon said he was convinced that the stem cells played a part in the recovery, not merely rest, as has been suggested.

“At the time we were performing the procedure, we knew what the stakes were, and the possibilities with regards to actually healing the ligament and having him return back to baseball,” Yoon said. “There were prominent surgeons out there that told him you need to reconstruct your ligament. To have him return the way he did shows some of the potential in sports medicine.”

Richards does not view himself as a heroic figure. Some doctors suggested surgery, yes, but others recommended he try the procedure. So he heeded their advice.

“How many people are gonna hear that, sit in the chair and be like, ‘Let’s just have surgery?’” he said.

But, as one of the first known pitchers to complete a stem-cell comeback, he understands the attention he will receive if his return continues unfettered.

“Obviously, I’m here because I enjoy playing baseball, and I like being a role model or an example for the next generation — or even the guys in this room,” Richards said. “If I could leave a thumbprint like that on the game of baseball outside of the actual game, there’s not a whole lot of guys who’ve been able to do that.

“For whatever reason, it worked for me, and I’m in this research experiment.”

He also understands the randomness with which his advocacy has swung.

“Let’s say it didn’t work, and I had to get surgery in September,” Richards said. “I probably would’ve been sitting here saying, ‘Man, I wish I would’ve just gotten the surgery in May.’”

Richards recognizes that other pitchers have had the same procedure and come back fine. He might even have talked to a few of them, who want to retain their privacy. It is just the circumstances around his injection that make him the potential poster boy.

“I feel like in the sports world, not just baseball, the medical side of it is very private, because the less other people know, the better, when it comes to contract time, when it comes to everything,” Richards said. “Leaked information can totally derail somebody’s career. To be honest with you, if I didn’t have to

come out and say anything about it, I probably wouldn't have. I probably would've just quietly disappeared for the whole year."

Yoon estimated he has performed the procedure on 15 to 20 professional pitchers. Physician-patient confidentiality agreements prohibit him from naming them, but only a few of those injections have been publicized.

"There's a number of high-level athletes that you see on 'SportsCenter' every day who have had this treatment," Yoon said.

Think about it from a player's perspective, Richards said.

"If I didn't have to come out in public and tell everybody that I was hurt and that I was going down this path, do you think I would have?" he asked. "Definitely not. But it wasn't like it was the end of the season and I just went home and had this done on my arm, which is probably when it's happened for other people.

"Then you take three months off, and it's the ideal time. Funny enough, right?"

Angels' Mike Trout and Albert Pujols share a laugh about new intentional walk rule

By Pedro Moura

Mike Trout became confused in last night's eighth inning at the Oakland Coliseum.

The Angels' star center fielder had just turned a single into a double with his speed and his effort, and now he stood at second base as the Angels' potential tying run. They were down, 3-2 with two outs in the inning, four left before their night was up.

And then, under Major League Baseball's new rules intended to speed up play a bit, the Athletics intentionally walked Albert Pujols with a mere signal.

"I called timeout, got back to the bag, and when I looked up, he was on first base," Trout said afterward. "It was different. He was laughing. I was laughing. It took me a little bit to figure out what happened. But that's the way it's going, I guess."

Pujols was not the first batter to be intentionally walked under the new rules. St. Louis Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina earned that distinction Sunday night against the Chicago Cubs. The Dodgers' Yasiel Puig and Minnesota's Brian Dozier were also issued the new intentional walk on Monday.

But Pujols was the first Angel, and surprisingly so. Teams walked Trout on purpose twice as often as they did Pujols last season.

After Pujols strolled to first and shared a laugh with Trout, C.J. Cron grounded out to shortstop, and the Angels' half of the eighth was over. They lost, 4-2, for their fourth consecutive opening-day defeat.

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER**Newcomer Danny Espinosa's late homer lifts Angels to victory over A's**

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND — A night after three new Angels all had forgettable regular-season debuts, they all made amends.

None more so than Danny Espinosa, whose three-run homer in the ninth inning erased a two-run deficit in the Angels' 7-6 victory over the Oakland A's on Tuesday night.

"It's a great feeling," said Espinosa. "Just to be able to come through for the team is the best feeling."

Espinosa, Cameron Maybin and Martin Maldonado had combined to go hitless in 11 at-bats with seven strikeouts in Monday's opening-night loss, but all three came up big in Tuesday's victory.

Maybin had two hits, including one leading up to Espinosa's homer. Maldonado had a two-run single to put the Angels on the board in the first inning, and he also erased two baserunners with an elite arm that has been dropping jaws all spring.

"That's what Martin can do," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's a game-changer behind the plate with his arm."

This game changed a few times.

Behind Matt Shoemaker's first regular-season outing since his 2016 season was ended by a 105 mph line drive to the head exactly seven months earlier, the Angels took a 4-2 lead into the seventh.

Then the A's scored four times in the seventh, against Angels relievers Blake Parker and Bud Norris, to take a two-run lead. After the heart of the Angels order could not manage a run in the eighth, it was up to the bottom of the order in the ninth.

The same bottom of the order that had struggled so much a night before. And they were facing A's right-hander Ryan Dull, who had struck out the side on Monday.

This time, Jefry Marte led off with a high chopper to third, for an infield hit. Maybin then rolled his second single of the night into left field. After Andrelton Simmons hit into a forceout, Espinosa came to the plate.

Dull got ahead of him 0-and-2, and Espinosa knew another slider was coming. That's how Dull struck him out on Monday. This time, though, Espinosa waited back instead of jumping at the ball. And Dull hung it.

Espinosa lofted it high and to straightaway right field. As the ball disappeared over the fence, the A's lead going with it, Espinosa punched his fist as he enjoyed his first big hit with his new team.

That just left one final piece of business, as Cam Bedrosian pitched the bottom of the ninth to record the save. Scioscia has been careful not to anoint Bedrosian the closer, but no one expected anyone other than Bedrosian to get the call for the Angels' first save opportunity of the season. If he does as well as he did on Tuesday — a perfect inning — he figures to hold on to the job.

The rally came too late for Shoemaker to get a victory, although simply being on a big league mound again was a victory for a guy whose previous outing led to emergency brain surgery.

That it was an inelegant 99-pitch, five-inning performance mattered little.

“Shoe struggled,” Scioscia said. “A lot of pitches to get through five innings. He had a lot of traffic on the bases. He got some big outs when he needed it. The (three) walks were uncharacteristic and he gave a lot of counts away. ... He'll be better next time. Just wasn't very pitch efficient tonight.”

He did pass one test, dodging out of the way of a 74 mph comebacker off the bat of Stephen Vogt. Vogt, who broke his bat, didn't hit the ball that hard, but it was nonetheless significant that the sight of a ball coming back at him didn't seem to shake Shoemaker. He retired five of the last six batters he faced.

That left 12 outs for the bullpen, though. The first man up was Parker, who had been one of the eye-opening performers of the spring by getting strikeouts for his last 17 outs of the exhibition schedule. He struck out his first two hitters of the regular season and then got a popup, getting the two-run lead to the seventh.

Scioscia then sent him to the mound for the seventh, although Parker had pitched more than one inning just once in the spring.

Parker gave up a single to Jed Lowrie, who took second on a wild pitch. After a strikeout, he gave up another single on Yonder Alonso's ground ball up the middle, cutting the lead to 4-3.

Next was Norris, who gave up a double — on a seemingly good pitch, down in the zone — to Marcus Semien. With runners at second and third, Rajai Davis hit a line drive that ticked off the glove of diving first baseman Marte.

The ball dribbled into the vast foul territory at the Coliseum. As right fielder Kole Calhoun and Espinosa, the second baseman, chased it down, two runs scored and Davis sprinted for third. Espinosa's throw then hit Davis. It bounced behind third, and Norris neglected to back up the base, so Davis scored to give the A's a 6-4 lead.

It was an ugly inning, but fortunately for the Angels, it wasn't the last one.

“We kept playing,” Scioscia said. “We cracked the door in the seventh and they took advantage. But we got it back. It's a good effort... It feels great. It's a great comeback win.”

Miller: Garrett Richards, Angels ready for their biggest game yet

By Jeff Miller

OAKLAND - The game is just one of 162, baseball being the sport that's almost as everyday as waking up.

The occasion, however, is much more significant than that, one the entire Angels organization will be studying closely, Garrett Richards appropriately positioned on the pedestal that is the pitcher's mound.

"I'm just going to go out there and keep doing what I've done all spring," Richards explained Tuesday. "I'm sure I'll have the adrenaline going. I don't know anyone in here who wouldn't."

It's way too early for a must-win, of course. But the Angels' game here tonight definitely will be a must-see.

Richards will make his first start since May 1, his first since opting for stem-cell therapy over Tommy John surgery, his first since becoming the most public example yet of a treatment both pioneering and polarizing.

"I might be the first one to be so open about it, I guess," Richards said. "I didn't really have a choice about keeping it private. But I don't mind being an ambassador for this or whatever you want to call it."

A guinea Angel, you might label Richards, stem-cell therapy very much still an experimental, developing approach to healing partially torn ligaments, like the one in Richards' right elbow.

In fact, there are some health experts who - because of the lack of sufficient research - remain unconvinced by the results, even as Richards is a living, breathing, believing example.

"Science, bro," he said. "I'm all for it."

As big as this latest step could be in the world of sports medicine, it's certainly just as sizable in the universe of Angels baseball.

This team already is staring at long enough odds of winning in 2017 with Richards - the ace of a rotation that will have to overachieve - available and making the usual 33 or so starts.

Remember those questions last season about the Angels giving up on the year and even more, possibly trading Mike Trout? They were the direct result of Richards being injured.

That's how important he is to this club's present and future, that importance reinforced again in October when owner Arte Moreno attended an instructional league game in Arizona to witness firsthand Richards working his way back.

Anyone who looks like Moreno and is sitting at an instructional league game, generally speaking, is the father of one of the players.

“All of these guys are important to our success,” pitching coach Charles Nagy said. “They’re all keys for us. With Garrett, you’re talking about a top-of-rotation type of guy.”

In the four starts before he was hurt, Richards gave up five earned runs in 25 2/3 innings, an ERA of 1.75.

Of course, the Angels won just one of those games. But that’s a completely different column.

Soon after Richards went down and barely five weeks into last season, the Angels were left trying to win a game by starting a long reliever - Cory Rasmus - and following him with a procession from the bullpen. They lost that night.

A whole lot of this team’s success again will be determined by the health and performance of its teetering rotation, Matt Shoemaker making his own type of comeback Tuesday.

The right-hander started for the first time since being struck in the head by a line drive in September, an incident that threatened much more than just Shoemaker’s career.

Richards, during his return, has called himself “extremely lucky,” the stem-cell treatments “pretty amazing” and, entering this first game back, his overall feeling “very grateful.”

When he made his initial start in spring training, Richards admitted he was more amped up than normal. He surrendered three runs and hit a batter, later explaining he “got excited” on a couple pitches.

But he also reached the upper 90s with his fastball, his adrenaline clearly not the only thing pumping. He and the Angels have seen no reason to expect anything different tonight.

“We’re excited for him,” Nagy said. “He’s worked hard. Everything’s gone as planned so far. There’s been nothing (negative). He’s ready.”

Richards has stopped throwing a changeup and plans to emphasize his two fastballs, one of which sinks while the other cuts, this being a pitcher talented enough to thrive with a limited arsenal.

He used a similar approach in 2014, when, before suffering a season-ending knee injury in August, he had a 13-4 record and 2.61 ERA, with a career-low WHIP of 1.038 and career-high WAR of 4.4.

In other words, by measures both traditional and new-age, Richards was at his best that summer.

Tonight, he could take a step toward being that good again, a monumental, season-shaping step, in only his team’s third game.

“I’m going to go out there,” Richards insisted, “and treat it like any other game.”

Just one of 162 and nothing like any of the 161 others.

Angels Notes: Ben Revere understands his role for now

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND — Ben Revere is in the difficult position of trying to again prove he is an everyday player while not being an everyday player.

The Angels signed the 29-year-old veteran on the heels of an injury-marred season in which he hit .217. And despite a hot spring, Revere remains the backup to Cameron Maybin for the team's left field spot.

Asked if he sees himself still competing with Maybin for playing time in left, though, Revere gave the team-first answer.

"We're all a family, no matter what happens," Revere said before Tuesday's game, which he again started on the bench. "No matter what happens, if I go the whole year being a backup, I'm going to try to get No. 9 (Maybin) to have the best year of his career. He could help us win a championship."

Maybin is coming off the best year of his career, a .315 average with the Detroit Tigers. The Angels installed him as the starting left fielder and were unwavering in their support for him despite him hitting .188 (9 for 48) in the spring. Revere was just the opposite. After his frustrating 2016 with the Washington Nationals, he hit .411 (23 for 56) in spring training.

Which he said is nice, but ...

"Spring training doesn't mean a damn thing," Revere said Tuesday. "It's all about performing when it counts. It starts now. ... When the lights come on and the pitchers turn up their game, then it's time to see if I can get back to the .300 average I'm used to."

Revere said he's feeling good about his swing — including a hard groundout in his first at-bat of the season, pinch-hitting on Monday — and it will be incumbent on him to keep that up, even with limited playing time.

"I'm always ready," he said. "You never know. It's a long year. I could be pouting, but I told myself to always be prepared. You never know when you're going to be called on, and you have to perform well."

MARTE FOR CRON

With the Angels facing a left-handed pitcher on Tuesday night, C.J. Cron was replaced in the starting lineup by Jefry Marte.

Cron has a career .252 average and .698 OPS against lefties, compared with .273 and .788 against righties. That's the opposite of how it typically works for a right-handed hitter like Cron.

"When C.J. is right, no doubt he can hit anybody," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He showed it last year. There are some splits that are maybe a little unexpected, but he's making adjustments."

Scioscia also said this particular lineup decision was more about wanting to get Marte into a game before he sits too long. Marte came into Tuesday's game with a .252 average but an .827 OPS against lefties.

The first base situation could get even more muddled when Luis Valbuena returns from the disabled list in about a month. Valbuena is a left-handed hitter, so he is likely to get most of the at-bats against righties, leaving Cron or Marte to face lefties.

ALSO

The Angels have nearly finalized their minor-league rosters. Top prospect Jahmai Jones, an outfielder, will begin the season at Class-A Burlington, Iowa. First baseman Matt Thaiss and outfielder Michael Hermosillo will both be at advanced Class-A Inland Empire. Catcher Taylor Ward will begin the season on the disabled list at Inland Empire because of a left oblique strain. Reliever Keynan Middleton, who rode a 100-mph fastball through three levels of the farm system last year, will start at Triple-A Salt Lake City. ...

At Triple-A, touted pitching prospect Nate Smith will start the season on the disabled list because of a forearm strain. The rotation at Triple-A will be Alex Meyer, Daniel Wright, Manny Banuelos, Alex Blackford and Drew Gagnon, according to General Manager Billy Eppler. ...

Huston Street, who is out with a strained lat, began his throwing program on Tuesday. Street is still at least a few weeks away from being activated. He was hurt during his first outing of the spring, on March 3. ...

The Angels extended their player development contract with Salt Lake City, ensuring their Triple-A team will remain there through the 2020 season. Salt Lake City has been the Angels' top affiliate since 2001. ...

Minor league infielder Keith Grieshaber was suspended for 50 games for a second failed test for a drug of abuse, Major League Baseball announced. Grieshaber was the Angels' 16th-round pick in last June's draft. He hit .317 between the Angels' two short-season affiliates last summer.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Not a Dull finish: Espinosa gets his revenge

By Maria Guardado / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On Monday night, A's right-hander Ryan Dull used a slider to strike out Angels second baseman Danny Espinosa swinging in the seventh inning of Oakland's victory on Opening Night.

One day later, Dull threw the same pitch to Espinosa, but this time he didn't miss it, launching a three-run, go-ahead home run in the ninth inning to lift the Angels to a 7-6 comeback win on Tuesday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

The Halos entered the ninth down 6-4 after the A's scored four runs in the seventh, but Jefry Marte and Cameron Maybin jump-started the rally with back-to-back singles off Dull. Andrelton Simmons then grounded into a forceout to bring Espinosa to the plate with runners on the corners and one out. Espinosa jumped on an 0-2 slider to right-center field to collect his first hit as an Angel.

"I faced [Dull] last night, and he kind of pitched me a little bit differently," Espinosa said. "After I got two strikes right there, I just wanted to try to back the ball up a little bit. The slider, I think, was trying to come in and was left a little out over the plate, and I just got a good barrel to it."

Espinosa was acquired from the Nationals in exchange for Minor Leaguers Austin Adams and Kyle McGowin in December to fill the Angels' hole at second base. The trade was a homecoming for Espinosa, who grew in Santa Ana as an Angels fan and attended Mater Dei High School and Long Beach State.

The 29-year-old hitter batted .209 with a career-high 24 homers in 157 games for Washington in 2016 and said it was nice to contribute to his new team early in the season.

"It was a great feeling," Espinosa said. "To be able to come through for the team is the best feeling."

Espinosa wasn't the only newcomer who enjoyed a big night for the Angels. Catcher Martin Maldonado added a two-run single and also made a pair of outstanding throws to pick off Marcus Semien from first and throw out Rajai Davis at second on a steal attempt. Maybin, meanwhile, finished 2-for-4 with a run scored.

"It's a great comeback win," manager Mike Scioscia said. "We kept playing. We cracked the door in the seventh and they took advantage of it, and then we got it back. Good effort."

Statcast of the Day: Maldonado shows off arm

Angels' catcher throws out runner, picks another off

By Maria Guardado / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- All spring, the word most often used to describe catcher Martin Maldonado's throwing arm was "cannon."

Maldonado's prodigious arm strength was on full display in the Angels' 7-6 comeback win over the A's Tuesday night at the Oakland Coliseum. In the third inning, Maldonado threw out the speedy Rajai Davis on a stolen-base attempt with a strong throw to second base.

Maldonado, 30, had a 1.88-second pop time on the play and fired an 87.5 mph throw to shortstop Andrelton Simmons to nail Davis, according to Statcast™.

"It was unbelievable," Halos starter Matt Shoemaker said. "When he threw out Davis, I just crouched down and heard 'Whoosh!' That's nice to have."

Added manager Mike Scioscia: "That was a laser he threw Davis out on. That's what Martin can do. He's a game-changer behind the plate with his arm. There's no doubt that when he throws, that ball comes out hot."

Maldonado, who was acquired from the Brewers in an offseason trade, had the fastest average pop time (1.91 seconds) of all Major League catchers who made at least 15 throws in 2016. He threw out 40 percent of potential basestealers last season.

"That's my game," Maldonado said in Spanish. "Being aggressive throwing to the bases. It's one of the reasons why they brought me here. To be able to show that on the first guy who ran, it gives me a little more joy than usual."

Maldonado also picked off Marcus Semien at first base with an outstanding throw from his knees in the second inning. He added to his impressive night by collecting his first hit as an Angel, a bases-loaded, two-run single to put the Angels ahead, 2-1, in the second inning.

Espinosa makes first Halos hit count vs. A's

By Jane Lee and Maria Guardado / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Danny Espinosa's three-run homer in the ninth inning off A's right-hander Ryan Dull lifted the Angels to a 7-6 victory at the Coliseum on Tuesday night, evening this series at one win apiece.

The blast to right-center field belittled the A's own come-from-behind efforts in a four-run seventh, when Rajai Davis lined a go-ahead, two-run triple off the glove of Angels first baseman Jefry Marte, racing home on an errant throw from Espinosa to wrap a wild play with two outs.

The Angels went scoreless in the eighth but got an infield single off the bat of Marte to jump-start things in the ninth. Cameron Maybin followed suit with a base hit, and Andrelton Simmons' ensuing forceout put runners at the corners for Espinosa, who made good on an 0-2 slider from Dull for his first hit as an Angel.

"One bad pitch," Dull said. "It was down, but I gotta get it a little bit lower. He hit 24 home runs [last year] for a reason. He's got power. You gotta execute a little better."

Angels starter Matt Shoemaker settled on a no-decision in his return to the mound. The right-hander, making his first start since taking a liner to his head on Sept. 4, held the A's to two runs in five innings -- both coming on home runs, one each to Jed Lowrie and Ryon Healy. Lowrie finished with three hits.

Shoemaker, who has decided to wear protective headgear this season, had a bit of a scare in the fourth when Stephen Vogt lined a comebacker to the mound, causing Shoemaker to instinctively spin away from the ball.

"It just threw me off a little bit," Shoemaker said. "I thought it was coming a little bit quicker. It was a broken bat, so it was a little slower than I thought. But yeah, you react to it with a little jump, but that's normal. You get a ball hit back at you, you're going to react to it."

A's lefty Sean Manaea, meanwhile, went six innings, allowing four runs on five hits and two walks with four strikeouts. Angels catcher Martin Maldonado's two-run single highlighted a three-run second inning against the southpaw, and Mike Trout added an RBI triple in the fifth.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Maldonado shows off cannon: Maldonado, the Angels' new strong-armed catcher, made a pair of outstanding throws to shut down the A's running game Tuesday. In the third, the fleet-footed Davis hit a leadoff single and then tried to steal second, but he was thrown out after Maldonado fired a perfect 87.2 mph throw to Simmons. Maldonado had a 1.88-second pop time on the play, according to Statcast™. The 30-year-old backstop also picked off Marcus Semien from first to end the second inning.

No cycle for you: Lowrie, who fell a triple short of the cycle, is 5-for-8 in this series. He nearly got his fourth hit -- perhaps a triple -- in the eighth inning, but right fielder Kole Calhoun played robber with an outstanding diving catch. Per Statcast™, Calhoun had to cover 57 feet and had 3.9 seconds to do so. The play had a 65 percent hit probability.

"He had a great night," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Lowrie. "That last one, if it gets by him, he's probably got himself a cycle. Calhoun made a great play, and those are the type of plays that show up in a game like that when it ends up being a one-run game."

QUOTABLE

"It was unbelievable. When he threw out Davis, I just crouched down and heard 'Whoosh!' That's nice to have." --*Shoemaker on Maldonado's laser throw*

WHAT'S NEXT

Angels: Right-hander Garrett Richards starts the third game of the four-game series between the Angels and the A's Wednesday night at the Coliseum. Richards missed most of 2016 after being diagnosed with a partially torn ulnar collateral ligament, but he avoided Tommy John surgery by receiving an injection of his stem cells in his damaged elbow.

A's: The A's will have right-hander Jharel Cotton on the mound for the third of this four-game series, with first pitch at the Coliseum scheduled for 7:05 p.m. PT. Cotton will be making just the sixth start of his career, after going 2-0 with a 2.15 ERA and .185 opponents average in five September starts with the A's last September.

Pujols fine with new intentional walk rule

Halos' slugger got a free pass in Monday's opener

By Maria Guardado

OAKLAND -- Entering Monday, Angels slugger Albert Pujols had 302 career intentional walks over his first 16 years in the big leagues. But his next one, which he received in the eighth inning of the Halos' 4-2 Opening Night loss to the A's, was a little bit different from the rest.

After Mike Trout doubled to give the Angels the potential tying run at second base with two outs, the A's signaled to issue an intentional walk to Pujols, who became the first Angels player to automatically take first under Major League Baseball's new rule.

In the past, pitchers had been required to throw four balls to the catcher to trigger an intentional walk, but MLB decided to scrap the pitches this season as part of its effort to improve the pace of play.

"It was a little bit different," Pujols said Tuesday in Spanish. "I don't have a problem with it. There isn't an advantage for anyone. We all have to adjust to the rules set by Major League Baseball and the Players Association. They're rules that we all have to get used to. The first ones are going to feel weird, but I think in the end we're all going to adjust."

Trout said it took him a moment to realize what had occurred after he saw Pujols trotting to first. "I called timeout, got back to the bag, and when I looked up, he was on first base," Trout said. "It was different. He was laughing. I was laughing. It took me a little bit to figure out what happened. But that's the way it's going, I guess."

The Angels weren't able to capitalize on their late-inning scoring threat, however, as A's pitcher Ryan Madson induced a groundout from C.J. Cron to end the inning, leaving the Halos trailing, 3-2.

Worth noting

- Reserve infielder Jefry Marte received the starting nod at first base over Cron against A's left-hander Sean Manaea on Tuesday. Though both are right-handed hitters, Marte has a career .827 OPS against southpaws, compared to .698 for Cron.

"I think definitely in the first week we want to try to get our bench guys out there," manager Mike Scioscia said. "You don't want them sitting too long. But I think Jefry is a great matchup for left-handed pitching. It's a good night for him to get some at-bats."

Cron has had reverse splits over his first three years in the Majors, with a .788 OPS against right-handers and a .698 OPS versus lefties, but Scioscia said he believes that trend might be more of an aberration due to Cron's limited at-bats against southpaws.

"I think C.J., when he's right, no doubt he can hit anybody," Scioscia said. "He showed it last year. There are some splits that are maybe a little unexpected, but he's making adjustments."

- Right-hander Huston Street, who has been sidelined since March 3 with a right lat strain, began his throwing program at the 60-foot mark Tuesday.
- The Angels announced Tuesday that they've extended their affiliation with Triple-A Salt Lake through the 2020 season.

Cotton, Richards square off at the Coliseum

By Maria Guardado

Angels right-hander Garrett Richards will return to a Major League mound Wednesday for the first time since undergoing stem-cell therapy to treat a damaged ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow when he makes his season debut against the A's at the Oakland Coliseum.

Richards will take on A's rookie Jharel Cotton, who went 2-0 with a 2.15 ERA over five starts in 2016 and is ranked the club's No. 14 prospect by MLB Pipeline.com. Cotton, 25, made his Major League debut against the Angels in September, tossing 6 1/3 innings of one-run ball to pick up the win.

Richards, 28, made his final start for the Angels on May 1 after being diagnosed with a partially torn UCL, though he avoided Tommy John surgery by receiving an injection of his own stem cells into his damaged elbow. Richards, who is 2-4 with a 4.53 ERA in 14 career games against the A's, is expected to face workload restrictions in his first full season back from injury and said during Spring Training that he will likely be capped at 100 pitches per outing.

"We're not going to go to extremes," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Tuesday. "You're not going to see Garrett throw 110 pitches, but he should be in a range where he can pitch deep into a game and hopefully be effective. The big thing with Garrett is just monitoring the bounce back and how he feels in between. He's had no problems to this point, and we want to make sure we keep it that way."

Richards has a career 3.24 ERA in the month of April.

Three things to know about this game

- Among all pitchers who have thrown at least 100 tracked curveballs or knuckle-curves since the start of 2015, Richards' average spin rate of 3,100 rpm is the second highest behind Mets right-hander Seth Lugo, according to Statcast.
- The A's players who have given Richards the most trouble over his career are Jed Lowrie (4-for-15 with one home run and four RBIs) and Trevor Plouffe (3-for-10 with two homers and five RBIs).
- Only four current Angels -- Kole Calhoun, C.J. Cron, Jefry Marte and Andrelton Simmons -- have ever faced Cotton. Cron and Simmons each have one hit in three at-bats against the A's rookie.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**Matt Shoemaker goes 5 innings in first game since liner fractured skull**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Not all athletes who suffer serious head injuries are able to overcome the physical and psychological wounds.

Exactly seven months after being struck in the head by a line drive that left him with a cracked skull, Matt Shoemaker looked every bit the same pitcher he had been.

Shoemaker tossed five effective innings in his return to the mound and Danny Espinosa hit a three-run homer in the ninth to rally the Los Angeles Angels past the Oakland Athletics 7-6 on Tuesday night.

It was Shoemaker's first regular-season outing since he was hit by a line drive off Kyle Seager's bat in Seattle last September, an injury that required surgery to stop bleeding in his brain. The right-hander wore a carbon-fiber insert under his cap to protect an area where a titanium plate was inserted on his skull.

"He's very determined," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's been very determined his whole career to get to this point. I think once he was physically fit, I think everyone felt that he would come back. He's got the perseverance to get back on that mound and hopefully have the success that he had before."

Shoemaker threw 99 pitches and labored at times. But he left with a 4-2 lead after allowing home runs to Jed Lowrie and Ryon Healy.

There was a bit of a scare in the fourth, when Stephen Vogt's broken-bat comebacker glanced off Shoemaker's hip.

"It felt pretty good. A little erratic with the location, but overall it felt pretty good," Shoemaker said.

The Angels trailed 6-4 in the ninth when Espinosa sent an 0-2 slider from Ryan Dull (0-1) over the fence in right-center.

"I just got a good barrel to it," Espinosa said.

Dull struck out Espinosa with a slider on Monday.

"One bad pitch," the reliever said. "It was down, but I have to get it a little bit lower. Especially with him. He hit 24 homers for a reason."

Jefry Marte's infield single got the Angels going in the ninth. Cameron Maybin followed with a single, and Andrelton Simmons reached on a fielder's choice that sent Marte to third.

Andrew Bailey (1-0) pitched a scoreless eighth for the win. Cam Bedrosian closed for his second career save and first this season.

Lowrie was 3-for-4 and nearly hit for the cycle. Right fielder Kole Calhoun's diving catch in the eighth robbed him of extra bases and likely the triple he needed.

Rajai Davis had a two-run triple for Oakland that barely reached the outfield grass. He scored on the play when Espinosa made an errant throw to third.

GAME CHANGER

Angels catcher Martin Maldonado showcased his powerful throwing arm, picking off Marcus Semien at first base in the second inning and catching Davis trying to steal second in the third. "That's what Martin can do," Scioscia said. "He's a game changer behind the plate."

HOMER HAPPY

The Angels homered against Oakland for the 17th time in 18 games and have won 31 of the past 48 meetings between the teams.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: RHP Huston Street, out since March 4 with lat strain, began his throwing program from 60 feet on flat ground.

Athletics: RHP Sonny Gray threw 25 pitches in his first bullpen session since sustaining a lat strain on March 7, manager Bob Melvin said. Gray used all his pitches and threw at full strength. He'll have at least one more bullpen before a rehab assignment. ... RHP Chris Bassitt will face hitters Wednesday for the first time since undergoing reconstructive elbow surgery last May.

UP NEXT

Athletics: Rookie RHP Jharel Cotton pitches Wednesday night against the Angels. He held opponents to a .208 batting average in six starts last season.

Angels: RHP Garrett Richards makes his first start since May 1, 2016. He underwent stem cell treatment in lieu of Tommy John surgery for a partially torn ligament in his right elbow.

FROM ESPN.COM

Faceless of the Game: Where have all the MLB superstars gone?

By Jayson Stark / ESPN Senior Writer

Can a game with no face really call itself the national pastime?

We raise this question because, as a new baseball season begins this week, there is no answer to the once-simple question: Who is the Face of Baseball?

The NBA is the LeBron and Steph Show. The NFL has Tom Brady, Aaron Rodgers and an army of rock-star quarterbacks. But baseball? On one level, it seems to be overflowing with dynamic young stars. Once it steps outside its own comfort zone, however, it's as "Faceless" as it has been in decades.

And how do we know? It's right there in the new polling data compiled by our friends at Luker on Trends, the company that runs the ESPN Sports Poll.

Between November and February, that firm surveyed more than 6,000 American sports fans, age 12 and older. If you don't count Tim Tebow (please don't) or Bo Jackson, guess the only three baseball players who showed up among America's 50 favorite pro athletes?

There was Derek Jeter, at No. 13. He hasn't played a game in 2½ years. Next came Babe Ruth, at No. 30. He's the only name on the list -- in any sport -- who hasn't appeared in a game for more than eight decades. And finally, you get to Pete Rose, at No. 50. The Hit King last played in the big leagues 31 years ago -- and he has been suspended from his sport for the last 28.

So there you have it. America's three favorite baseball figures: Guys who have been dodging the box scores for a combined 116 years.

The first active player who shows up on this list is Chicago Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo at No. 51. He can thank that raging epidemic of Cubs Fever.

In baseball's defense, respondents were invited to name either active *or* retired athletes. So the still totally retired Michael Jordan ranked as America's favorite basketball player (and favorite any kind of player, for that matter). And the no-longer-playing Peyton Manning was our nation's second-favorite football player (behind Brady).

But 15 active NFL-ers, six active hoopsters, two soccer stars (Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo), two tennis legends (Serena Williams and Roger Federer), one swimmer (Michael Phelps), one hockey player (Sidney Crosby), one sprinter (Usain Bolt), one race car driver (Dale Earnhardt Jr.), one mixed martial artist (Conor McGregor) and one Tiger (Woods) all make appearances on this list before a single active baseball player.

Oh, and one more thing: In polling 17,908 American sports fans on the same question between January and December 2016, the response was pretty much identical. The only significant variation: David Ortiz (at No. 23) was the one other baseball player to crack the top 50. But Jeter, who was just as retired last year as he is this year, was still the top baseball name on the list at No. 12.

So what should we conclude from this data?

"We've got to tell Derek, 'You've got to get the uniform back on,' " jokes New York Yankees manager Joe Girardi. "It's time to tell him, 'You've got to get in shape.' "

No, that won't be happening. But what *is* happening? What has brought baseball to this point? And what should it do about it? Let's answer those critical questions:

Could any baseball player be LeBron?

We begin with a fact from the same polling data: Nearly one in four people who consider themselves "avid" NBA fans (23 percent) say LeBron James is their favorite player. *That* is how you define the face of your sport.

Now contrast that with baseball -- in which no one even remotely approaches the star power of a LeBron. There isn't a single player in the sport who ranks as the favorite of even 3 percent of all "avid" baseball fans. At the top of that list is the Cubs' Kris Bryant at 2.9 percent. For comparison, in the NFL, Brady checks in at 9.3 percent.

"That 2.9 percent for MLB is a mixed blessing," says Rich Luker, the founder of Luker on Trends. "It means the favorites are distributed more evenly across all teams compared to the NBA or NFL -- giving all teams a rooting interest. But no one athlete is big enough to draw national attention."

So what is it about baseball, or LeBron, or the NBA's star-making machinery, that produces that dramatic a disparity? Arn Tellem thinks he knows. For more than 30 years, he was a high-powered agent for players in both sports. But in 2015 he crossed over to the other side, to work for the Detroit Pistons as a vice chairman for Palace Sports & Entertainment.

"In basketball, compared to baseball, the best player usually wins the last game of the year," Tellem says. "If you look at the modern NBA, it was Magic [Johnson] and [Larry] Bird, leading into Isiah [Thomas] and Jordan ... and now Steph Curry, along with LeBron. And the best player usually wins the last game of the season, or is *in* the last game of the season. So the NBA playoffs and Finals are a tremendous showcase for the greatest players and the greatest athletes in this country."

There is no arguing with that, but this just in: The 2016 NBA Finals, featuring that LeBron and Steph Show, still got clobbered in the ratings by the World Series. As did Game 7 of those finals, by Game 7 of the World Series. So while LeBron might have six consecutive appearances in the Finals going for him, that's not all he has.

For more than three decades, dating to the arrival of Bird and Magic, the NBA has embraced star power as the secret sauce for How To Sell Your League. And baseball? Not so much.

"Baseball has always promoted the game," Tellem says. "But it's been more about the game and its history. And it's been less about the individual players."

Tellem sees that approach beginning to change. Finally. But in a star-driven society, he said, it can't shift gears fast enough.

"Baseball is at a point now where they have to reach the youth of America," he says. "And clearly, [promoting] the game is important. But it's about using stars and developing stars and helping them become bigger names, as a way of reaching the youth. And baseball has to see that convincing [those stars] and having them participate will serve the game."

Are the stars just too young?

Let's take a step back and recognize that at least part of this is cyclical. The most popular active player in the NFL is Tom Brady. He's 39 years old. The most popular player in the NBA is LeBron. He's only 32, but this is his 14th season.

They occupy a space in their sport that Jeter and Big Papi once occupied in baseball -- megastars who have been around forever, won their rings and transcended not just their market but their entire sport. But once Jeter and Ortiz (and even Alex Rodriguez) spun out the revolving door, was there *any* baseball player ready to take their place?

Mike Trout is 25. Bryce Harper is 24. Bryant, Mookie Betts, Nolan Arenado, Manny Machado, Corey Seager, Francisco Lindor, Carlos Correa, Noah Syndergaard and Kyle Schwarber are all 26 or younger. They're among the brightest stars in baseball. But they're all still writing their stories. We can recite LeBron's and Brady's sagas by heart.

"Think about this," says one longtime agent. "Tom Brady is [39] years old. He's won five Super Bowls. He might be considered the greatest football player ever. And LeBron might be the pinnacle for every athlete, in terms of how much coverage he gets. Name things Albert Pujols did or A-Rod did that approach that. Even Jeter didn't look to get everything he could. There's a camera in LeBron's face every minute of every game. Unless you're a pitcher, how much is the camera on any baseball player? A couple of minutes a game?"

The point is that the faces of football and basketball have built-in star power that no active baseball player has right now. In baseball, you hear that phrase "period of transition" a lot. With time, with enough October glory, with the right star-making moments, any of those names above could be the next Face of Baseball. But that's not all it will take.

First, it will take marketing. And MLB and the players' association have been talking for months about new ways to use players to promote the game. The union is committed, says its chief of business affairs, Tim Slavin, to helping the sport market baseball "around the individuality and personality of the players." That has to happen, said union head Tony Clark, because "we've got a special group of players, as special as any we've had in a long time."

"We have veterans," Clark says. "We have young players. We have tall, short, heavy, light. We have all of it. ... So there's an opportunity there. And it's something that's been discussed for some time."

But this is about more than marketing. It's about culture. It's about making players understand the responsibilities that come with stardom: Major stardom. LeBron-level stardom.

To be a Face of Baseball also means being a Voice of Baseball -- and being available to be that type of voice day after day, through the longest of seasons. In the NBA, LeBron speaks regularly for himself, for his team, for his sport, even for his generation, because he has been conditioned to the reality that it's part of the gig. But baseball players have never been expected to take on that responsibility.

"We're at a point now where the younger stars coming up have to be groomed that way," one baseball official says. "By their ballclubs. By GMs. By managers. By the players' association. They have to understand what accountability and what media relations are all about ... because once you've learned to say no, it's easy to say it again and again."

And finally, baseball has to find ways to overcome its natural limitations. As a local attraction, the cash registers are ringing nearly everywhere. And every market needs its local heroes. But as a sport, as a national presence, baseball also needs icons. There is more to producing those icons than just sitting back and waiting for them to arise organically.

"Baseball has got a group of young players who I think are the next generation," Tellem says. "But one problem is, they're not known as well because they haven't come out of their markets. Baseball is more local, so they haven't been exposed nationally like basketball players. Baseball has got to try and elevate them, which it's never really done, and get behind individuals."

But when folks inside the game hear this type of advice, they ask: What are the players doing to elevate themselves?

Why isn't Mike Trout "The Face?"

If the NBA or NFL had a 25-year-old two-time MVP in its midst, you think there's any chance he would rank behind, say, Roger Staubach, on a list of America's most popular athletes in the 21st century? Of course not. But Trout's absence from this top 50 actually is a microcosm of his sport's issues.

The Los Angeles Angels' spectacular center fielder has so many selling points: transcendent talent, easy smile and a genuine, low-key, almost Jeter-esque personality. But five full seasons into his career, his team has never won a single postseason game, let alone a World Series. And then there's this: Mike Trout has no interest in being baseball's LeBron.

The pride of Millville, New Jersey, is a simple guy, consumed by his devotion to baseball and a set routine. So he has regularly turned down invitations to do late-night talk shows and major national endorsement gigs, not to mention home run derbies and the World Baseball Classic. That's a source of enough frustration inside MLB that, when we brought up his name to one baseball official, he grumbled, "Mike Trout doesn't leave Orange County or Millville."

But Trout's agent, Craig Landis, has this message for everyone clamoring for more of his otherwise lovable client: *Relax. Please.*

"Mike Trout doesn't leave Orange County or Millville."

Baseball official on Mike Trout's commitment -- or lack thereof -- to being the Face of Baseball

"He's only 25," Landis says. "His story is not finished. He's not going to change as a guy. Why change? Everything is going great. He's got a lot of time. And everything is evolving nicely."

Among both baseball fans and "avid" baseball fans, Trout ranks as the second-most popular player in his sport, behind Bryant. But in the sports marketing community, he is viewed as a guy who owes it to his employers to do more to promote the game.

"If you're signing this big contract and you're benefiting, you have to try to grow the game," says Bill Sutton, director of the Sports and Entertainment Management MBA program at the University of South Florida. "I feel this way about any sport. It's the athlete's obligation to grow the game. Other people made it better for you coming in. You need to make it better for the people coming after you and the people who are there with you."

But while Trout bides his time, he might find himself losing the spotlight -- to a guy who already has passed him in popularity, according to the ESPN Sports Poll.

Can Kris Bryant be "The Face?"

If you injected people inside the commissioner's office with truth serum and asked them to predict the next Face of Baseball, we'd bet Rob Manfred's mortgage they would nominate Kristopher Lee Bryant.

The Cubs' third baseman has fielded the last out of a fairly memorable World Series. His looks and personality are straight out of a Hollywood casting call. He has a monster shoe deal with Adidas. His Red Bull prank videos have gone viral. And he just turned 25.

"I feel like he *is* going to be the Face of Baseball," says his 2016 Cubs teammate David Ross, "because he already is that perfect. He's the guy that makes you sick to your stomach. You know sometimes when you're on a plane during the season, you like to complain, right? Or you're like, 'I can't believe we're waiting through this rain delay.' And Kris chimes in like, 'I'm just happy I get to play baseball for a living.' And you're like, 'Shut up, dude. You make me sick.'"

"He's just this golden child when it comes to his mindset. He just wants [to] go out and be the best baseball player. He loves baseball, and he wants to be great because he expects that out of himself. He's been the greatest player on every stage he's ever stepped on. High school player of the year. College player of the year. Minor league player of the year. MVP of the league. Rookie of the year. He makes me sick to my stomach. Give me a break."

Every arrow around Bryant is pointing up, including the polling data this winter, which places him as the most popular player in the game among both general baseball fans and "avid" fans. But he also plays for a team with a ton of charismatic faces around him.

Can a whole team become "The Face?"

Anybody want to nominate the entire Cubs franchise as the next Face of Baseball?

"I really think the Cubs are The Face," Sutton says. "I've never said this in baseball before -- or at least not since the '50s and '60s, when the Yankees just dominated and they were the Face of Baseball. But now it's back, except this is for a totally different reason. Now it's a different world, and you have a team

that did something extraordinary ... and they've created something. And now everybody wants to emulate it."

But what makes the Cubs a potentially powerhouse Face of Baseball ensemble is more than talent, more than just those curses they busted, more than the monstrous TV ratings they put up last October. What is so compelling about the Cubs is that they project such a different vibe than pretty much every other team in the game.

"I feel like he is going to be the Face of Baseball, because he already is that perfect. He's the guy that makes you sick to your stomach."

David Ross on Kris Bryant

In a sport that has long suppressed personality, this is a team led by a manager, in Joe Maddon, who encourages it. And by proving they could do that and still win, they're teaching the rest of their sport a vital lesson.

"No doubt about that," says Ross, an admittedly far-from-objective witness. "And playing for Joe just solidified what I already thought I knew. You don't have to fall into the old baseball way -- just keep your head down, play hard and keep your mouth shut. You can be a person. You can do stuff off the field. You can enjoy yourself off the field and still bring it on the field."

And you know what Ross learned from being part of that culture? That when a team expresses that joy - and lets its fans share it -- it creates the bond baseball is working to make.

"The people who fall in love with you, the fans, they're going to love you even more," Ross says, "because they know who you are. I think that gets lost in a lot of organizations, where it's just so old school -- and 'this is how we do it here, and it's either my way or the highway' -- which doesn't work for everybody. You're not getting the most out of the person because you're not letting the person be himself."

The Cubs think otherwise.

Does baseball need to change?

At the union, Clark is adamant that baseball needs to adjust how it markets its stars. "I think the game plan has simply always been the same," he says. "I don't think it's changed much in regards to the marketing of the game."

What the union sees is a sport long reluctant to center campaigns on its stars. And Clark laments all the "missed opportunities" to do that. But three MLB officials, none of whom wished to speak on the record, disagree vehemently.

They point to years of TV spots built around dozens of players. They emphasize that one of the biggest reasons MLB just contracted with Under Armour to supply uniforms is that company's promise to

feature players in major ad campaigns. They say MLB has emphasized, with every partner it's negotiating with, that player-based marketing has to be a key component of every deal.

So in reality, says Bill King, a senior writer at "SportsBusiness Journal," baseball's Face of Game problem isn't about the marketing the sport does on its own, "and I don't think it ever has been," he says.

"We talk about what a league does to market," King says. "To be honest, the resources of a Gatorade or Nike go well beyond the league. The league is really good at reaching the people who are already paying attention. It's those other brands that are good at getting you out front of people who might only be halfway paying attention.

"You know," King says, tongue only slightly in cheek, "the NBA didn't make Michael Jordan. Nike made Michael Jordan."

But the big shoe companies have never latched on to baseball players at anywhere near that level -- for obvious reasons.

"Because kids," says one baseball official, "don't wear baseball cleats to school."

Still, Nike made Trout the first baseball player since Ken Griffey Jr. to have his own name-branded baseball shoes. Adidas just signed Bryant to what ESPN's Darren Rovell reported was a record-setting shoe deal that will pay him more than \$1 million a year. The record Bryant broke was one set by Harper just last year, when he signed a 10-year extension with Under Armour.

So the stars are beginning to line up on the vital sponsorship side of this equation. What this sport needs now, to get back into the Face of Baseball business, is the sort of culture change that will allow the game to give people what sports fans demand in the 21st century -- a culture built around players who aren't afraid to express their personality.

"If you're signing this big contract and you're benefiting, you have to try to grow the game. ... Other people made it better for you coming in. You need to make it better for the people coming after you and the people who are there with you."

Bill Sutton, director of the Sports and Entertainment Management MBA program at the University of South Florida

In the NBA, Tellem says, that's what David Stern and his successor as commissioner, Adam Silver, have encouraged for years -- allowing players to step forward "and take responsibility for the direction of the game."

"This idea of being accessible to the media, getting players comfortable with speaking to the media, I think that's something baseball should work with the players on, and draw upon these great examples of the stars in the NBA," Tellem says. "These are great examples I think that they can learn from and follow, because it has worked. And it really has only helped the NBA's popularity. And I think it would help baseball tremendously, to get these players out there."

What baseball officials often say, when they hear these sorts of suggestions, is that baseball players are more available to the media than players in any other sport. But there's a difference, Tellem says, between being available and feeling free to express their true personalities.

In the NBA, he says, the openness of the biggest stars has always provided a role model for the stars that followed. But in MLB, the model for today's players couldn't be more different.

"The greatest stars, for years, haven't done that," Tellem says. "The brightest stars in baseball have been very careful about how much they've opened themselves up. They've been the exact opposite, because they don't have examples."

There are ascending stars in their mid-20s everywhere you look in baseball. Yet not one of them found his way into the 50 most popular professional athletes in America. If that's not a wake-up call, what is?

Baseball needs a Face. It has literally dozens of players who could become that Face. But if it wants that Face to ever approach the stature of a LeBron in modern American culture, that can't happen unless everyone resolves to commit to that goal in a way this sport never has before.

"There's no doubt about it," Bill Sutton says. "The game's got to change. If you want the game to grow, if you want the game to have a different audience, if you want the game to attract young people, you've got to change."

FROM NBC SPORTS

Mike Trout was confused by new intentional walk rule

By Bill Baer

In late February, Major League Baseball officially announced the new intentional walk rule, which allowed managers to intentionally walk an opposing batter with a signal rather than instructing his pitcher to throw four pitches wide of the strike zone. The signal wasn't invoked much in spring training, so we had to wait until April to see it in action. Understandably, it's going to take some getting used to.

According to Pedro Moura of the Los Angeles Times, Angels center fielder Mike Trout was confused by the new rule during the eighth inning of Monday night's season opener against the Athletics. Trout had doubled to bring Pujols to the plate. With first base open, Athletics manager Bob Melvin opted to intentionally walk Pujols, so he gave the signal.

Trout said, "I called timeout, got back to the bag, and when I looked up, he was on first base. It was different. He was laughing. I was laughing. It took me a little bit to figure out what happened. But that's the way it's going, I guess."

The intentional walk worked in the Athletics' favor as, after Pujols was given first base, C.J. Cron grounded out to end the inning. The Angels went on to lose 4-2.

FROM THE PLAYERS TRIBUNE**105 mph to the head**

By Matt Shoemaker

When the baseball smacked into the side of my head, it was traveling 105 miles per hour. Yet somehow I didn't hear a sound.

I never lost consciousness, so I remember everything about that moment.

I can even remember the breath I took before I threw the pitch — just that long, exaggerated inhale through the nose as I focused on hitting my spot, my lungs filling up with air.

Then, after a brief pause, I did what I had done thousands and thousands of times before — I wound up, lifted my left leg to my chest and threw the baseball toward the plate.

It was the second inning. One out. We were in Seattle, last September, playing the Mariners. I was looking to go with a heater inside, but after I released the ball it tailed back over the plate.

And Kyle Seager just flat-out barreled it.

I must have seen the baseball coming at me, because I reacted to it. I got my head turned and my arm up. I actually almost caught it.

But after that, everything just went silent.

Not only did I not hear the ball hitting my head.

I didn't hear anything at all.

Nothing.

But the crazy thing is that I actually felt O.K. when it happened.

I knew I'd been hit, so I just kind of went down to my hands and knees.

I wasn't hurting, though. I was dizzy. And light-headed. But there was no pain.

Nothing hurt. I'd just been knocked off my feet by a laser-beam line drive, but the main feeling that I experienced as a result was one that caught me completely off guard.

Calm.

Pure calm.

It just overtook my entire body.

It was unlike anything I'd ever felt.

I first noticed the blood when the training staff got out to the mound.

As soon as they reached me, they began asking a bunch of questions:

“What day is it?”

“What’s your name?”

“Where are you right now?”

“Why are you here?”

Those were a breeze. I answered them all with no difficulty — “Sunday. Matt. Seattle. I’m pitching against the Mariners.” Honestly, I was more concerned with a different question.

Can I stay in the game?

For real ... I tried to convince our trainers to let me keep pitching. They were talking about helping me up and how I was going to get over to the dugout, and I stopped them. “Hold on a second,” I said. “Let me try to see if I can still pitch. Gimme a few warmup tosses to see how I feel. I’m just a little dizzy is all.”

They just laughed at me.

I didn’t fully understand that response until I stood up and almost fell over because I was so woozy. Both of our trainers needed to support me under my arms in order for me to walk without going down.

Once I reached the dugout, one of the first people I saw was Albert Pujols.

The first thing he said was, “Let me call your wife.” Then he grabbed a phone from Tim Mead, our p.r. guy, and started dialing Danielle. It was such a thoughtful thing for Albert to do. My wife and I were so appreciative that he connected the two of us right away.

When she got the call from Albert, my wife was watching the game on TV back in Anaheim. So she had seen what just happened to me. She knew I was doing O.K. since she had watched me walk off the field, and she was probably expecting to hear from somebody about my condition. But I’m sure she was pretty confused when that call came in. I mean, Tim Mead’s number pops up, and then all of a sudden Albert says, “Hello.”

After telling her that I seemed to be doing O.K. and not to worry, he handed the phone to me.

I remember that conversation being pretty normal, actually.

She had seen me walk off the field, so she knew I wasn’t knocked out. But still, now that I think about it, *she was extremely calm about the whole thing too*. At the time, Danielle was seven months pregnant with our daughter, Emmy, and on full bed rest by doctor’s orders. There was some concern that she might go into labor early. So she had a lot going on. And yet ... just super, super calm.

There was no panic. And that helped me feel like everything was going to be fine. The trainers said I still needed to head to a hospital for observation, but that was no big deal.

Within a few minutes, I was on a gurney and some paramedics were rolling me into the back of an ambulance headed for Harborview Medical Center. It was only about a mile away from the stadium.

They didn't even turn on the sirens. Or the lights.

It was all good.

Almost as soon as I arrived at the hospital, the doctors huddled up, pulled out a laptop and were like, *Hey, we're gonna watch the video ... do you want to check out what happened?*

I was definitely light-headed and dizzy at the time, but my eyesight was fine. So I was all in.

They pulled up the video and hit play.

I thought for a second that it might be weird to see it. Or that it might freak me out. But, honestly, it wasn't a big deal.

We watched it a couple of times, and grimaced in unison, and then the doctors told me the plan. They were going to do a CT scan every hour for several hours, and then assess the images to make sure nothing about my condition had worsened. There were sure to be skull fractures, and some internal bleeding, but as long as things didn't take a turn for the worse I'd be able to recover from my injuries over time. I'd be out of the hospital in the morning.

The first two scans looked great. There was a little bit of bleeding, but nothing too major or concerning. Rick Smith, one of our trainers, was with me at the time, and I remember talking to him about whether I might be able to pitch when my turn in the rotation came up in five days. He knew that no matter how good the scans looked, I wasn't going to be back out on the hill for a while just based on the league's concussion protocol, but he kind of humored me and deflected those questions.

"These two scans look great!" I said. "I'm all good."

Then the third scan came back and everything changed.

"There's more blood. We're going into surgery ... right now."

That's all the doctor said. Nine words. No messing around.

He wasn't trying to scare me. He was just looking to move quickly.

At that point, I just kind of did what I was told. I didn't ask any questions because there was nothing I could ask. I'm not a neurosurgeon, you know? I wouldn't have known what to ask. Plus, there wasn't much time for small talk.

Within 30 seconds, I was being prepped for emergency brain surgery — nurses were unplugging me from machines, other nurses were scribbling things on medical charts, everyone was moving in double time.

That's when everything got *really* real.

The first thing I thought about was my family.

I grabbed my phone and FaceTimed Danielle, just to let her know.

"Hey, they told me I'm going into surgery right now. Literally right now. There's more bleeding in my brain."

Again, total calm.

Maybe she was keeping her cool for me, I don't know. But she held it together.

There was no panic. She didn't cry.

What she did do was grab our son, Brady, who was a little over a year and a half at the time, so he could see me and say hello.

We talked for a minute, maybe two, and then I had to go. As I was speaking to Danielle, the nurses were wheeling me over to the operating room. I had wanted to call my parents to give them an update, but the woman pushing the gurney said that there was no time for another call, so I asked Danielle to do that for me.

I told her that I loved her, hit the red button on my screen, and she was gone. Then I handed my phone and my wedding ring to someone for safe keeping, and they wheeled me into the operating room for emergency brain surgery.

I'm super close with my parents, so not being able to call them and let them know what was going on was extremely difficult.

When the ball slammed into my head in Seattle, they were more than 2,000 miles away, in Traverse City, Michigan, watching the game on TV while visiting my aunt and uncle. They had made the four-hour drive north from where they live, and where I grew up, just outside of Detroit.

My dad has always been a tough, hardworking guy — he's a teddy bear on the inside, and solid as a rock. After he found out I was headed in for brain surgery, he got up, got into his truck and drove away. He didn't tell anyone where he was going. "Just out for a drive," he said, and then he was gone.

No one at my aunt's place was certain where he was going.

They also weren't sure if they'd ever see me alive again.

When I woke up from surgery, I felt like a jackhammer was stuck inside my brain. I was still groggy from the medicine and anesthesia, which didn't seem to be doing anything to minimize the throbbing.

There was also a drain hanging from the side of my head, which definitely threw me off there for a second. It looked like a little rubber hose.

They tell me I was being operated on for two hours. The type of injury I had is called an epidural hematoma.

When the ball hit my head, it resulted in a bunch of skull fractures, and pressure from the impact damaged an artery and caused bleeding. The fractures went from the spot where I got hit down to the middle of my jaw. The doctors said there were a ton of little fractures. You can see them on the X-rays. It looks like what happens when a rock hits your windshield — like a spiderweb of tiny cracks. But in this case the windshield was my skull.

The bleeding inside my brain was the bigger problem, though. That's why everything escalated so quickly.

From what I've been told, the surgeons made a half-circle incision on the right side of my head, and then they peeled that back and cut a chunk of my skull out. They needed to do that so they could get under there to fix the artery that was damaged and causing the bleeding. Then they put that piece of skull back, placed a titanium plate over it, and sewed everything back up.

Adam Nevala, our head trainer, was sitting at my bedside when I came to. He stayed there with me for three full days. I can't tell you how much that meant to me. That guy had a wife and a new baby at home — not to mention our team was starting a series out in Oakland the day after this happened — yet he was there every morning at my side, all the way through most of every night.

And believe me, I wasn't much fun to be around at that point. I just had this massive headache the entire time. I was super sensitive to light and sound. We couldn't even watch our games, or the highlights, because the TV just made my head hurt even worse. Nev used his phone to get updates and keep me in the loop as to how the team was doing — I remember we beat the A's that next day. We'd basically just talk and hang out the whole time.

The other thing I did to pass the time was take selfies of my scar.

I did that not so much for the photos, but instead because I had this fascination with what my head looked like after having brain surgery. When I first woke up, I touched the scar, and it felt kind of weird. But I had no idea what I was actually touching. There was no context. So I had to take some pictures, you know?

It wasn't easy, since even just opening my eyes made my head hurt worse. But I couldn't just sit there all day, day after day, without checking it out. I realized pretty early on that if I closed one eye while taking the photos, it didn't hurt as much. So that's what I did.

At first I was kind of surprised to see that they hadn't cut my hair for surgery. I just kind of assumed that they would've shaved my head, but they hadn't. So early on, the pictures I took were mainly just of bloody hair.

There was just blood everywhere.

But the more photos I shot, and the closer I got to the wound, the more the whole thing looked kind of cool to me.

And, of course, after seeing what my head looked like, I wanted to touch the scar even more — to feel it and to trace the entire incision line with my fingers.

Something just kept making me want to touch that scar.

I left the hospital after three days, but those headaches lingered for about four weeks. Then, one day, out of the blue, they just went away.

From that point on, I felt like I was in the clear, and things pretty much went back to normal. I was able to be with the team for the last homestand of the season. I wasn't as bothered by loud noises. I could watch TV and listen to music again.

And that's also when I started to fully understand the ways that me taking a 105 mph line drive to the dome had impacted the people around me.

As my condition improved, my wife and I talked more and more about those first few hours after the accident. She didn't say it to me at the time, of course, or even show any hint of worry, but Danielle later admitted that during the FaceTime call right before the surgery she grabbed Brady and put him on the screen because she was afraid that he may never see me again.

She said she couldn't stop thinking about whether that conversation was going to be the last time the two of them ever spoke with me.

The person who may have struggled the most during that time of uncertainty might have been my father. The first time I saw him after the surgery, he gave me a solid three-minute hug.

For real ... it lasted three minutes. He just didn't let go, so we kept on hugging.

It turns out that when he drove away from my aunt's house in Traverse City, he headed for a nearby parking lot. He pulled in, put the car in park, shut off the engine ... and cried.

He couldn't bear to show those emotions around everyone at the house. He didn't want them to see him and then get even more worried about me. So he took off.

He never told me about it, but that's what went down.

My mom let me know.

When I heard about that, a whole bunch of emotions came to the surface at the same time. It felt good knowing that my dad loved me so much, but I also felt sad for him, and bad for having caused him so much worry.

More than anything, though, I just felt grateful.

I also had the sudden urge to bring joy into the lives of those who had worried so much about whether I was going to make it.

So that's what the next six months is all about for me.

The first time I played catch after my surgery was in early December.

I was back home in Michigan, and so I headed over to Wayne State. It was only throws from 60 feet that day, so it wasn't anything monumental, but I hadn't felt that excited to throw a baseball in a long time. And the really cool thing was that aside from excitement there weren't any other feelings or emotions that I was experiencing. There was no nervousness, no weird flashbacks or tense moments as a baseball approached my head.

I never even thought about getting hit in the head during that first throwing session, and since that point very little has changed.

Spring training felt the same as it always has — just with an added layer of thankfulness and appreciation, as well as a carbon-fiber protective plate inside my Angels cap.

The first time I was out there throwing to live batters, everything was just completely normal. The first ball that was hit was a grounder to short — so not close, but close-ish to the mound. And it was fine. It was kind of like, *O.K., finish your pitch, follow through ... oh, hey, he hit the ball, oh it's toward short, it's out of your reach, so continue through and finish your motion.* Just the normal routine. The only real difference was that after that first live BP session, everyone was showing me so much love. The coaching staff, the players in the field, the hitters I was facing, other guys waiting to hit, they were all shaking my hand and telling me how glad they were to have me back.

When I got in my first game, right at the beginning of March, again the main emotion for me was excitement. I was so excited, in fact, that I was overthrowing the baseball and missing my spots over and over again. There was just so much adrenaline and anticipation for that appearance, so I just kind of had to do what I could.

You know what it was like, actually? It was how a kid running out there for his first Little League game of the season plays the game. It was like, *Gimme the ball! Let's pitch. Let me throw the ball. Hurry. This is so awesome!* I felt like I was 10 years old again — which was sort of cool in terms of an excitement level.

And, most important, I didn't worry for a second about getting hit in the head with a baseball.

People look at me like I'm crazy when I tell them that I'm not fazed by what happened — that I don't think about it constantly or have nightmares about it.

But it's true.

Only two things ever make me think about that incident. The first is when someone asks me about it ... which is fine. I don't mind talking about it. Honestly. Heck, if I met someone that this had happened to, I'd ask him about it too.

So that's the first one. The second is when I'm doing my hair and I look in the mirror.

When I do that, I see the scar. Sometimes I even touch it again, like I did back at the hospital.

And sometimes when I do that, I think back to what happened. But, you know what? More often than not, I think about how cool it is to have that scar.

It adds to the story of my life.

It kind of sucks that my hairdo is never going to be the same again. But, all things considered, I'm actually a pretty big fan of that scar.

The thing I'll remember most about this whole "getting nailed in the head with a baseball" chapter of my life isn't the actual injury, or the emergency surgery, or the ridiculous headaches that lasted for weeks and weeks. It's the outpouring of love that flowed in my direction after I got hit.

I remember waking up from surgery and looking at my phone with one eye closed and seeing that I had literally hundreds of unread text messages. Hundreds.

Ordinarily, if I have five texts waiting ... that's a banner day for me. Like, maybe it's my birthday.

So to see several hundred messages sitting there waiting for me, ready to cheer me up and show me support ... that was really special. And they came from everywhere — family, friends, teammates, coaches, Kyle Seager, other players around the league, guys I grew up with, former teachers, and on and on.

I replied to every last one of those texts, too.

It was tough. I had to kind of work in shifts and then give myself a break because reading and typing hurt my head so much.

It took me two or three days. But I got 'em all eventually.

Since then, I've had some conversations with a few guys who have experienced what I've gone through — Brandon McCarthy, Evan Marshall, a couple of others — and those talks have been extremely helpful. In addition, several players' wives have reached out to Danielle and offered their support. It's almost like our families are all members of this little club that no one would ever want to join.

There's a little extra attached to each of our stories now, but at the end of the day we're all the same people we were before. And for me, there's nowhere that's more evident than at home with Danielle, Brady and Emmy.

To the kiddos, I'm just dad.

Emmy was born after my surgery, so she doesn't know any different version of me prior to getting hit by that ball. And Brady's such a wild man that he hasn't really even noticed the scar. He's too busy running around the house and knocking things over.

He's seen it a couple of times, and I've pointed it out to him. But, for real, that kid just wants to keep playing.

So the only difference for him after this whole thing is probably that he now gets hugged a little bit tighter by daddy.

And you know what, now that I think about it, I'm hugging a bunch of people a little bit tighter these days.