



Clips

(May 30, 2014)

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels right fielder Kole Calhoun thrives in return to leadoff spot

By Mike DiGiovanna

Most hitters say they try to keep the same approach no matter where they are batting in the lineup, but that definitely wasn't the case with Angels right fielder Kole Calhoun on Thursday night.

Calhoun had one hit in 19 at-bats in seven games since returning from a sprained right ankle on May 21, with all of his starts coming at the bottom of the order, and he was admittedly too impatient at the plate, swinging at bad pitches.

But that all changed Thursday night with a return to the leadoff spot, from where Calhoun had two hits, two walks, scored three runs and saw 29 pitches in five plate appearances in the Angels' 7-5 win over the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field.

"I wanted to see some pitches, work deep into some counts, and I was able to do that," Calhoun said. "Your typical leadoff hitter is going to try to get on base and let these guys know what the starting pitcher is throwing, especially early in the game.

"I saw six pitches in my first at-bat, and I laid off some close ones in my second and third at-bats. That's something personally I need to do, and it's good for the team. I set the table and had a good night."

Calhoun said Thursday night was the best he's felt timing-wise at the plate, and sending both of his hits to the opposite field, a single to left-center in the third inning and a double to left in the sixth, was a good sign.

"I've been swinging at a lot of their pitches," Calhoun said. "The name of the game is to pick your own pitch, to do damage with something in the middle of the plate. I hit a couple of good pitches, had some knocks, got on base, scored some runs. If I'm going to be in that one-spot, that's got to be my game."

Calhoun led a 15-hit attack that included three hits from Erick Aybar, who broke the game open with a three-run home run in the fourth, three hits and two runs batted in from Mike Trout, and three hits and two runs from C.J. Cron.

The Angels have won 14 of 20 games and are 1 1/2 games behind the American League West-leading Oakland Athletics going into a big three-game series at the Oakland Coliseum that starts Friday night.

"We're playing as a team, and that's what it's going to take, 25 guys, to win a series there," Calhoun said. "It's a tough place to play. They're a good team. But I love what we have in this locker room right now.

"There's a lot of weapons in here, one through nine. Guys have their special things that they bring to the table. Everyone's going to have to do what they do and do it well, and we'll be all right."

Erick Aybar hits a three-run homer in Angels' 7-5 win over Mariners

By Mike DiGiovanna

KEY MOMENT: With the Angels leading 6-2, Kevin Jepsen replaced starter Matt Shoemaker with runners on second and third and one out in the sixth. Jepsen got Michael Saunders, who hit a two-run homer in the fourth, to fly to the wall in left, a run scoring, and cleanup batter Justin Smoak to hit a flare toward the left-field line. Grant Green made a running/diving catch to save a run.

AT THE PLATE: Erick Aybar crushed a full-count pitch from Mariners starter Brandon Maurer over the 380-foot sign in right-center for a three-run homer in the fourth, turning a 2-0 lead into a 5-0 cushion. The shortstop has 29 runs batted in. Kole Calhoun, making his first start in the leadoff spot since his return from a right ankle sprain, had two hits, two walks and scored three runs in six plate appearances. Mike Trout had three hits and two RBIs; C.J. Cron had three hits and two runs.

ON THE MOUND: Shoemaker, called up from triple A after reliever Sean Burnett went on the disabled list, retired the first nine batters en route to a solid 51/3-inning, three-run, four-hit, six-strikeout, no-walk effort that pushed his record to 3-1. During the Angels' current 14-6 run, starters have fashioned a 2.94 earned-run average. Mike Morin and Joe Smith pitched scoreless innings. Fernando Salas gave up a two-run homer to Kyle Seager in the ninth, but Ernesto Frieri retired Stefan Romero and Dustin Ackley for his eighth save.

REHAB REPORT: Reliever Dane De La Rosa (shoulder irritation) pitched in triple-A games Wednesday and Thursday but is not ready to return. "He's slowly making progress," Manager Mike Scioscia said, "but to get the confidence to know he's where he needs to be might take a few more outings."

RELIEVED: Top relief prospect R.J. Alvarez, who was shut down because of elbow tenderness and returned to Anaheim for tests May 21, "checked out fine," said General Manager Jerry Dipoto.

UP NEXT: Right-hander Garrett Richards (4-1, 3.00 ERA) will oppose Oakland left-hander Drew Pomeranz (4-2, 1.38) at Oakland Coliseum on Friday at 7 p.m. On the air: FS West. Radio: 830.

Albert Pujols gets day off on eve of Angels' series against Athletics

By Mike DiGiovanna

Thursday night's game between the Angels and Seattle Mariners was played with almost a half-billion dollars' worth of player contracts on the bench.

Mariners second baseman Robinson Cano, who signed a 10-year, \$240-million deal last winter, was scratched because of illness, and Angels first baseman Albert Pujols, who signed a 10-year, \$240-million deal before 2012, did not start for the first time this season.

But it was a scheduled day off Pujols, who said he is physically sound. The Angels didn't need his bat — they banged out 15 hits in a 7-5 win in Safeco Field, with the top three players in the lineup — Kole Calhoun, Erick Aybar and Mike Trout — combining for eight hits, five runs batted in and four runs.

And Pujols got a much-needed break.

"They told me [Wednesday] that no matter what, it was going to be a day off," Pujols said before the game. "They don't even want me to take batting practice."

Pujols is hitting .262 with 14 homers, 14 doubles and 32 runs batted in, but he hit .236 with five homers and 19 strikeouts in his last 28 games and was in a one-for-13 slump before his run-scoring double in the ninth inning Wednesday.

Pujols, 34, admitted to being "pretty beat up" by four games on Toronto's artificial turf earlier this month. He has been running gingerly at times but said his lower half is "good, better than it was on the last road trip."

Manager Mike Scioscia didn't see anything in Pujols' recent swings that prompted the day off.

"With Albert, he's been in every game, and to just give him a chance to recharge is important," Scioscia said. "Albert would play until the cows came home, but it's time for him to take a day. He definitely benefits from exhaling and resting."

Pujols missed the final two months of 2013 because of a partial tear of the plantar fascia in his left foot, and Scioscia has tried to pace him by using him at designated hitter 11 times.

But with Josh Hamilton out since April 9 because of a torn left-thumb ligament and David Freese and Calhoun missing chunks of April and May, it has been almost impossible to give Pujols — and fellow core players Trout, Aybar and Howie Kendrick — full days off.

Pujols prides himself on playing every day and said he "tried to fight" Scioscia's decision, but not too much. The Angels are 11/2 games behind the American League West-leading Athletics entering Friday night's game at Oakland, the first of a three-game series, and it wouldn't hurt to have a well-rested No. 3 hitter.

"It stinks, but at the same time, you can't be selfish," Pujols said. "We have a big series coming up, and it's a long road trip."

With Freese (.213) and Raul Ibanez (.153) struggling, it has been difficult to find consistent lineup protection for Pujols, but that could change soon.

Hamilton, who opened the season as the cleanup batter, hit in the cage and took batting practice on the field Thursday. The left fielder, slowed last week by a bone bruise in his left thumb, is expected to resume his rehabilitation stint with triple-A Salt Lake on Friday, and Scioscia said he could be activated on this road trip.

When Hamilton is ready, the Angels will have to decide whether to send first baseman/DH C.J. Cron, who is hitting .323 with three homers and nine RBIs in 21 games, or utility player Grant Green, who is batting .377 in 19 games, back to Salt Lake.

Cron tripled off the center-field wall in the fourth inning Thursday night and scored on Green's two-out single to center. Cron also singled in the seventh and doubled in the ninth.

"There are some tough decisions," Scioscia said. "That's good for us."

Angels' Albert Pujols gets first day off; Josh Hamilton nears return

By Mike DiGiovanna

Albert Pujols was not in the starting lineup for the first time this season Thursday night, but the Angels first baseman said it was a scheduled day off and that he has not been slowed by any kind of injury.

"They told me [Wednesday] that no matter what, it was going to be a day off," Pujols said before Thursday night's game against the Seattle Mariners in Safeco Field. "They don't even want me to hit. I'm just going to go to the cage and get loose. I'm not taking batting practice, either."

Pujols is batting .262 with a team-leading 14 home runs, 14 doubles and 32 runs batted in, but he had had only one hit in 13 at-bats in four games before his RBI double in the ninth inning broke up Felix Hernandez's shutout Wednesday night.

But Manager Mike Scioscia said he didn't necessarily see something in Pujols' recent swing or the way he is running or playing defense that suggested he needed Thursday night off.

"With Albert, obviously, he's been in every game, and to just get him a chance to recharge is important," Scioscia said. "There are a lot of guys who have played a lot. Albert would play until the cows came home, but it's time for him to take a day today. He definitely benefits from exhaling and resting."

With Pujols out, Scioscia moved Mike Trout from second to third in the order, dropped Howie Kendrick from the leadoff to the fifth spot and moved Kole Calhoun back into the leadoff spot for the first time since he returned from a right ankle sprain on May 21.

The Angels could also get their cleanup batter, Josh Hamilton, back soon. The left fielder, out since April 9 because of a torn left-thumb ligament, hit in the cage and took batting practice on the field Thursday.

Barring setback, Scioscia said, Hamilton -- who is also recovering from a bone bruise in his left thumb -- could resume his rehabilitation stint with triple-A Salt Lake on Friday and join the Angels next week in Houston.

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Angels' top of the order helps topple Mariners, 7-5

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE -- The Angels could have waited for Kole Calhoun to get hot before putting him back in the leadoff spot.

Turns out, the reverse worked. Calhoun said the lineup spot caused him to be more productive.

Calhoun, who had been in a 1-for-19 slump, went back to the leadoff spot and changed his approach, resulting in four times on base in the Angels' 7-5 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Thursday night.

Calhoun said that he was swinging at too many bad pitches in his first week since coming off the disabled list. He said before the game that he hoped a move back to leadoff would be just the trigger to get him to be more disciplined, and he was right. He walked twice and had two hits.

"Your typical leadoff hitter is going to try to get on base, let these guys know what the starting pitcher has, especially early in the game," Calhoun said. "I saw six pitches my first at-bat, laid off some close ones in second and third at-bats. That's something personally I need to do, and it's good for the team."

Calhoun, Erick Aybar and Mike Trout – the top three in the order on a night that Albert Pujols got his first day off of the season – combined to reach base 11 times, creating plenty of scoring opportunities.

"We did a lot of (good) things," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "We had a lot of guys in scoring position. We didn't cash in all of them, but we got enough done. We pressured them all night."

Aybar drove in three runs, all on his fourth homer of the year. Aybar has 29 RBI, nearly halfway to his career high of 59.

Trout had his first three-hit game since April 15 and he drove in two runs.

At the other end of the order, C.J. Cron and Grant Green each had good showings as they battled for what is likely one roster spot once Josh Hamilton returns, probably next week.

Cron had three hits, including a double and triple. Green had an RBI single and he made a diving catch in left field to save a run, another sign that he's adjusting to the new position.

Matt Shoemaker picked up the victory, allowing three runs in 5 1/3 innings. Shoemaker buzzed through the first nine Seattle hitters in order, but the Mariners started to hit him the second time through the order so Scioscia went to the bullpen in the sixth.

Kevin Jepsen, Mike Morin, Joe Smith got the game to the ninth inning. Fernando Salas entered with a four-run lead and gave up a two-run homer to Kyle Seager, but Ernesto Frieri then recorded the final two outs for the save.

Angels stress importance of upcoming series against A's

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE – Let the pennant race begin.

While the calendar is still on the final days of May, it's never too early to have a big series. That's just what the Angels face Friday, as they go to Oakland for the first time this season. They haven't seen the first-place Athletics in six weeks.

"It's early in the season, but any time you play your division rivals it's huge," Angels catcher Hank Conger said. "We're not dumb. We know they're in first place. It's early, but it's important. It's going to be a big test for us to get a gauge of where we stand."

That would be second place. Thanks to the Texas Rangers' injuries, the Seattle Mariners' general inconsistency and the Houston Astros' youth, the AL West looks like it might be a two-team race.

The Angels will play the A's in six of their next 12 games, including a series at Angel Stadium on June 9-11.

"I don't think it's too early for a big series," Kole Calhoun said. "They are going to be huge."

The A's have won the division two years in a row, each time defying expectations. Even with that recent track record, they have been somewhat of a surprise this year because they've played so well despite the loss of two of their top starters, Jarrod Parker and A.J. Griffin. Still, the A's have bolted to first place, with the best run-differential in the game.

"They're a team, man," Calhoun said. "They're a team, in every aspect. They all believe in each other. They all go out and play baseball together. That's what teams do. They've been doing it for some years now."

Added Conger: "Hopefully they get the credit they deserve considering what they've done the past two years. The biggest thing that is pretty noticeable is they grind. They don't waste at-bats. They are hard-nosed. They are always pretty much in it to the ninth."

When they met last month at Angel Stadium, they played three one-run games, including two extra-inning games. The A's won two of three. Since the start of 2013, 10 of their 22 meetings have been decided by one or two runs.

PUJOLS SITS

Albert Pujols had started every game of the season until Thursday, when Manager Mike Scioscia gave Pujols a day off he didn't want.

"It (stinks), but at the same time you can't be selfish," said Pujols, who conceded that a day off can be a benefit.

Pujols had hit .198 with a .253 on-base percentage over his previous 20 games, but he said he's feeling fine physically. He said his recent at-bats, including a ninth-inning double Wednesday, encourage him that he is turning the corner.

REHAB REPORT

Josh Hamilton, who is expected to resume his rehab assignment Friday, could return to the Angels in the next week.

Hamilton, whose rehab from thumb surgery was stalled when he suffered a bone bruise of his left thumb, took batting practice the past two days in Seattle. He is expected to play for Salt Lake City starting Friday in Tacoma.

If all goes well, Hamilton could join the Angels on Tuesday in Houston, where he has a career OPS of 1.129. ...

Dane De La Rosa appeared in back-to-back games Tuesday and Wednesday for the first time in his rehab assignment. Scioscia said De La Rosa is "slowly making progress. I think for Dane just to get the confidence to know he's where he needs to be might take a couple more outings."

On deck: Angels at A's, Friday, 7 p.m.

By Jeff Fletcher

Where: O.co Coliseum

TV: Fox Sports West, 7 p.m.

Did you know: The season will be exactly one-third completed after Friday's game.

Athletics update: The A's are leading the majors in run differential, which is an indication they should be winning even more than they are. As usual, they are stringing their offense together with a collection of role players around one budding star. Third baseman Josh Donaldson (.276, 13 HR, 41 RBI) is an early candidate for MVP. The question is how long the A's can survive, having lost two of their top pitchers – Jarrod Parker and A.J. Griffin – for the year. So far, replacements Tommy Milone, Drew Pomeranz and Jesse Chavez have done the job.

THE PITCHERS

RHP GARRETT RICHARDS (4-1, 3.00)

Richards is returning, in a sense, to where it all began. The Angels plugged Richards into the rotation July 27, 2013, at Oakland. He pitched five scoreless innings, and he's been a starter ever since. Richards has a 3.39 ERA over 23 starts.

- **Vs. Oakland:** 0-2, 5.29

- **At O.co Coliseum:** 0-1, 3.79

- **Loves to face:** John Jaso, 2 for 12 (.167)
- **Hates to face:** Brandon Moss, 6 for 16 (.375)

LHP DREW POMERANZ (4-2, 1.38)

The 25-year-old is finally enjoying some big league success after being one of baseball's top prospects. He was the fifth overall pick in the 2010 draft by the Cleveland Indians, who dealt him to the Colorado Rockies in the Ubaldo Jimenez trade. Pomeranz had a 5.20 ERA with the Rockies and was traded to the A's. Injuries have allowed him to slip into the rotation for four starts so far, and he's made the most of his opportunity.

- **Vs. Angels:** 0-1, 2.08
- **At O.co Coliseum:** 3-0, 0.00

UPCOMING MATCHUPS

Saturday: A's LHP Tommy Milone (3-3, 3.50) vs. Angels LHP Tyler Skaggs (4-2, 3.97), 7 p.m.

Sunday: A's RHP Sonny Gray (5-1, 2.31) vs. Angels RHP Jered Weaver (6-3, 2.99), 1 p.m.

Angels Afterthoughts: Ode to Kevin Jepsen

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE – Mike Scioscia used five relievers in tonight's 7-5 victory, but he singled out one of them when dishing out praise.

"Outside of Fernando Salas maybe losing some counts in the ninth inning and giving up a homer, our bullpen did a terrific job, Kevin Jepsen especially," Scioscia said.

Jepsen entered in the sixth with runners at second and third and two outs in a 6-2 game. He retired both hitters, although a run scored on a sacrifice fly.

The ERA next to Jepsen's name in the box score still reads 4.24, which is nothing too impressive. However, he's been steadily whittling that down ever since he gave up five runs while recording only two outs on opening night.

Since that game, Jepsen has a 1.65 ERA. Opponents are hitting .127 against him.

Yes, he's allowed eight of 22 inherited runners to score, but that's just 36.3 percent. The league average is 30 percent, so he's about 1.5 runs worse than average. He's stranded 13 of the last 16.

LINEUP JUGGLING

Kole Calhoun had a big night back at the top of the lineup, but Scioscia wouldn't commit to keeping him there every day.

The Angels will see left-handed pitchers in the first two games of this weekend's series in Oakland, so he may use Erick Aybar or even Collin Cowgill.

"I think we'll mix and match a little bit," Scioscia said. "He did a good job tonight. When he gets comfortable we talked about him hitting at the top. Against lefties, we've got some guys who are doing a pretty good job getting on base too. We'll have some options."

ALSO...

It's now apparent that the Angels plan to pull David Freese for defense late in games. They did it twice in Seattle. Earlier in the season, Scioscia indicated he may give Freese the benefit of the doubt when Ernesto Frieri was the closer because he doesn't give up many ground balls anyway, but he seems to now prefer John McDonald at third, regardless of who's pitching...

McDonald picked up his eighth hit of the year, which equaled his total from all of last year.

Pujols gets first day off as Angels finish in Seattle

By Jeff Fletcher

SEATTLE -- Albert Pujols is out of the Angels lineup, for the first time all season, as they play the Seattle Mariners in the final game of a four-game series Thursday night at 7.

Pujols said he tried to talk Manager Mike Scioscia out of it, but in the end he understood that the occasional day off is not a bad thing.

"You definitely can benefit from one," the 34-year-old slugger said. "You don't want a day off, but if they're telling you to take the day off, you take the day off."

Pujols has hit .198 with a .253 on-base percentage over the past 20 games, but he said he's feeling fine physically.

While the Angels wait for Pujols to get hot again, they are inching closer to having Josh Hamilton back in the lineup. Hamilton took batting practice this afternoon. He could rejoin Salt Lake City on Friday -- the Bees are playing just down the road, in Tacoma -- and be activated when the Angels get to Houston on Tuesday.

The Angels will send Matt Shoemaker to the mound against Orange Lutheran High product Brandon Maurer tonight.

The Angels lineup has Kole Calhoun back in the leadoff spot for the first time since he came off the disabled list. Scioscia said he moved Calhoun back because he wanted to move Mike Trout down to No. 3 while Pujols is out, and he needed two table-setters ahead of Trout. Calhoun also said he's hoping a return to the leadoff spot can help him be more selective. He said he's been swinging at too many bad pitches during his 1-for-19 slump since coming off the disabled list.

The lineup's other interesting wrinkle is that Grant Green got the nod over Collin Cowgill for the first time. Green is hitting .388, while Cowgill has slumped to .217 over the past three weeks. Expect Cowgill to come in for defense if the Angels are ahead late in the game.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Angels erupt with Pujols-less lineup to earn split

By Alden Gonzalez

SEATTLE -- They've done it for more than seven weeks without Josh Hamilton, and for one night, the Angels did it without Albert Pujols, getting multi-hit games from four different players, a monster homer from a light-hitting shortstop, a solid start from a long-time Minor Leaguer and two impressive catches from a raw left fielder in Thursday's 7-5 win at Safeco Field.

"There's a lot of weapons in here," right fielder Kole Calhoun said, "one through nine."

In the finale of a four-game series, they really only needed one through three.

Angels manager Mike Scioscia forced Pujols to take his first day off, then reworked the top of his batting order against the Mariners. Calhoun hit first for the first time since returning from a sprained right ankle a week ago, Erick Aybar settled in behind him and Mike Trout batted third.

The three combined to go 8-for-11, scoring four times, drawing three walks and bringing in five runs -- three of which came off Aybar's bat, on a home run that sailed over the 380-foot sign in right-center field.

"We had lots of opportunities and we cashed in on enough of them and held on," Scioscia said, just before boarding a flight to Oakland for a showdown against the first-place A's. "Those three guys had terrific nights, no doubt."

Calhoun entered with just one hit in 19 at-bats since coming off the disabled list, then went 2-for-4, scoring three runs and walking twice, and later said it was the best his timing has felt since going down on April 15.

"I had been swinging at a lot of their pitches," Calhoun said. "You have to pick your own and do damage with something over the middle of the plate. ... If I'm going to be in that [leadoff] spot, that's got to be my game."

Aybar went 3-for-5 and already has 29 RBIs this season, just 30 shy of his career high.

"I just try to see the ball and forget there are people on base," he said in Spanish. "Do the job, and not put any pressure on myself."

Trout went 3-for-3, drawing a walk and driving in a couple of runs to put his batting average at .291.

But the contributions seeped outside of the top three, too.

There was C.J. Cron, hitting a triple -- one inning before Raul Ibanez did the very same -- and adding a single and a double to put his batting average at .323 since being called up four weeks ago.

There was Grant Green, still relatively fresh in left field, making a couple of key catches with runners on second and third and one out, allowing Kevin Jepsen to escape the sixth with a three-run lead. Green drifted to deep left-center to catch Michael Saunders' sac fly near the wall, then dove to his right to rob Justin Smoak of a run-scoring hit.

"If he misses that ball and it goes down the line, it's a [two]-run game with a man on second," Trout said. "That's a big play in the game."

And before that, there was Matt Shoemaker making the short drive from Tacoma, Wash., to reclaim his rotation spot in the big leagues and pitch 5 1/3 innings of three-run ball, giving up four hits, walking none and striking out six to put his ERA at 3.31 since filling in for Hector Santiago.

"He was throwing the off-speed pitches, keeping everybody off-balance," said Mariners third baseman Kyle Seager, who made it a two-run game with a ninth-inning homer off Fernando Salas, prompting Ernesto Frieri to come out of the bullpen and record the final two outs.

"It's definitely a confidence-builder, knowing I'm able to pitch at this level," Shoemaker said. "I just want to contribute to this team as much as I can to get us to the playoffs and World Series."

The latter is far too distant right now, but the Angels at the very least know they'll enter a three-game series against a first-place team playing good baseball, at seven games above .500 while getting contributions up and down the roster.

Their deficit of the A's, losers of six of their last eight, is now only 1 1/2 games. And the Angels have 30 wins before June for the first time since 2008.

"This whole team's been playing as a team, and that's what it's going to take," Calhoun said. "It's going to take 25 guys to go out and win a series there. It's a tough place to play, and they're a good team. But I love what we have going on in this locker room. The team is playing well. We gotta keep doing it."

Calhoun finds his mojo at the leadoff spot ...

By Alden Gonzalez

Kole Calhoun's return to the leadoff spot was merely a byproduct of Albert Pujols missing his first game of the season.

But it may have gotten him going nonetheless.

Calhoun entered Thursday's game 1-for-19 since coming off a six-week rehabilitation from a sprained right ankle, then went 2-for-4 in the 7-5 win over the Mariners, hitting a double, drawing two walks and scoring three runs. The 26-year-old right fielder believes returning to the leadoff spot played a part in feeling better than he has at the plate since coming off the DL, because it forced him to take pitches and be more patient.

"Your typical leadoff hitter is going to try to get on base, let these guys know what the starting pitcher has, especially early in the game," Calhoun said. "I saw six pitches my first at-bat, laid off some close ones in my second and third at-bats. That's something personally I need to do, and it's good for the team. I set the table and had a good night."

Calhoun entered the season as the team's leadoff hitter, and hit there for 11 of his first 14 games.

Asked if he'll continue to ride Calhoun at the leadoff spot, Angels manager Mike Scioscia said: "I think we'll mix and match a little bit. He did a good job tonight. When he gets comfortable, we talked about him hitting at the top. Against lefties we got some guys who are doing a pretty good job getting on base, too. We'll have some options."

Translation: Calhoun may actually sit over the next two games, as the A's start the series with lefties Drew Pomeranz and Tommy Milone. Calhoun has hit lefties well in his career, but Scioscia has been going with Grant Green and Collin Cowgill in the outfield corners in those situations.

Pujols begrudgingly gets first day off of year

By Alden Gonzalez

SEATTLE -- Albert Pujols won't be starting 162 games this season. Angels manager Mike Scioscia made sure of that on Wednesday, when he told his superstar first baseman he'd be sitting for the first time in Thursday's series finale at Safeco Field and didn't let Pujols talk his way out of the day off.

He tried, though.

"Yeah, but they said no," Pujols admitted, laughing. "They don't even want me to hit. I'm just going to go to the cage just to get loose. I'm not taking batting practice, either."

The primary goal -- more so than having him in the lineup for every single game -- is to make sure Pujols stays as fresh as possible throughout the season, especially after he missed the last two months of 2013 with a partial tear of his left plantar fascia.

Pujols said his lower half is "good" and "better than it was on the last road trip," when the hard turf at Rogers Centre in Toronto took its toll on the 34-year-old. But Scioscia wanted to give Pujols the day off "just to get him to recharge."

"Albert will go out and play till the cows come home," Scioscia added. "It's time for him to take a day."

Pujols is batting .262 with a team-leading 14 homers, but his production has dipped over the last month or so, with a .236/.298/.445 slash line, five homers and 19 strikeouts in his last 28 games. In his last at-

bat against Felix Hernandez on Wednesday night, though, Pujols stayed back on a 93-mph fastball and drove it to right field for a two-out RBI double in the ninth.

"It was middle-out, and that was a ball I was pulling a little bit," said Pujols, who has started at designated hitter 11 times this year. "I was able to stay through it. Hopefully I can take it to the next series, and hopefully I get an opportunity to play tonight."

Hamilton ready to restart Triple-A rehab stint

By Alden Gonzalez

SEATTLE -- Barring an unforeseen setback, Josh Hamilton is slated to restart his rehab assignment with Triple-A Salt Lake on Friday, and Angels manager Mike Scioscia is confident his cleanup hitter will return to the lineup before the club's road trip ends in Houston on June 5.

Hamilton was jammed badly in his first rehab game on May 22, then was scratched from the lineup on Friday and Saturday and was diagnosed with a bone bruise on his surgically repaired left thumb on Monday.

By Wednesday, he was hitting in the cage again. Prior to Thursday's game, he hit on the field in Seattle without the protective splint that was bothering him upon contact. And on Friday, he'll be in nearby Tacoma, Wash., playing for the Salt Lake Bees again.

Butcher voices opinion on Tommy John surgery influx

By Alden Gonzalez

SEATTLE -- The amount of pitchers requiring Tommy John surgery has become almost an epidemic, one that continues to rattle the brains of doctors, coaches and front office members throughout the industry. According to Yahoo! Sports' Jeff Passan, 44 professional pitchers have or will undergo the invasive procedure so far this year, with Angels reliever Sean Burnett among the latest.

Angels pitching coach Mike Butcher has two theories on why ulnar collateral ligaments are tearing so much more often these days.

He's one of many who believes it's bad for kids to play only baseball year-round, which often results in them putting too much stress on arms that have not yet matured. And just as importantly, Butcher says too many professional pitchers are throwing from the opposite side of the rubber (meaning, a right-hander throwing from the first-base side and a left-hander throwing from the third-base side).

Butcher has found that more than 30 of the pitchers who have undergone Tommy John surgery this year fit that description.

"Some guys do it because they feel like they'll be in the strike zone more, they'll have better command that way -- there's all sorts of different philosophies about it," Butcher said. "But for me, if you're on the

opposite side of your throwing arm on the rubber, you are constantly pronating your arm at a higher rate than if you are on the other side. There's no leverage behind the baseball.

"There's guys who have been very successful doing it, who have maintained their health. But I think for the most part, the guys that are on their throwing-arm side of the rubber are less prone to injury because there's less stress on the arm."

Garrett Richards is among the Angels pitchers who throw from the opposite side of the rubber, but Butcher said he isn't overthrowing or pronating because Richards' delivery has him coming way across his body.

"You try not to think about it," Richards, 26, said of so many pitchers being subject to a torn UCL. "As a player, you can't think about the possibility of getting injured. You play the game as hard as you can until it happens and then you move on from there."

Ex-Angel Morales still searching for work

By Alden Gonzalez

SEATTLE -- Longtime Angels first baseman and one-time Mariners slugger Kendrys Morales is still looking for work, the last one standing among free agents who rejected a qualifying offer and are thus tied to Draft pick compensation.

"I want to see him playing," Angels shortstop Erick Aybar, Morales' good friend, said in Spanish. "He's a great guy, great person, great teammate. The season's gone on a while already and he hasn't signed. And [Stephen] Drew already signed. Let's see what happens these next few days."

Drew joined the Red Sox, a team that doesn't have to surrender its first-round Draft pick to sign him because he finished the previous season with them. The Mariners could do the same with Morales, who rejected their \$14.1 million qualifying offer in October, but have seemingly shown little to no interest.

That means the 30-year-old switch-hitter will have to wait until after next week's First-Year Player Draft, so teams don't have to give up a Draft pick to sign him.

Aybar has kept in touch with Morales, who's currently with his family in Miami and is "working out, trying to stay in shape."

Signed out of Cuba in 2005, Morales -- represented by Scott Boras -- finished fifth in American League Most Valuable Player Award voting in '09, suffered a devastating leg injury while celebrating a walk-off homer the following year and missed nearly two full seasons before being productive again from 2012-13, posting a .275/.329/.457 slash line with 45 homers and 153 RBIs with the Angels and Mariners.

"It's gotta be very difficult for him, especially a guy who takes as much pride in his work as he does," said Raul Ibanez, who played with Morales last year. "I feel for Kendrys because he's a really good hitter."

Worth noting

- Asked about trading for a lefty reliever in the wake of Sean Burnett tearing his ulnar collateral ligament, Angels general manager Jerry Dipoto said: "If the chance at acquiring somebody who helps us in that role is there, we're certainly going to be open to the idea."
- Relief-pitching prospect R.J. Alvarez was placed on the seven-day Minor League disabled list because of elbow tenderness on May 21, but an MRI revealed that his UCL is fine. Alvarez, ranked No. 7 in the Angels' system, is rehabbing in Tempe, Ariz., and has responded well to treatment. He should return to Double-A Arkansas shortly.
- Dane De La Rosa (right s/c joint irritation) appeared in back-to-back outings for Triple-A Salt Lake for the first time on Tuesday and Wednesday, giving up a run in each one-inning outing. He isn't ready to join the Angels just yet, though. Scioscia said his "stuff looked good," but "to get the confidence where he needs it to be might take a couple more outings."
- Grant Green started over Collin Cowgill in left field and Kole Calhoun batted leadoff for the first time since coming off the disabled list against Mariners right-hander Brandon Maurer on Thursday. Scioscia wants to keep Green in the lineup since he's riding a .388/.404/.510 slash line. With Pujols out, he wanted Mike Trout to bat third and Howie Kendrick to hit in the middle of the order (fifth).

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Angels-Athletics Preview

By Nicolino DiBenedetto

The Oakland Athletics may be atop the AL West, but their struggling bullpen is a big reason why the Los Angeles Angels have been able to gain ground.

This three-game series gives the Angels a chance to overtake them.

Los Angeles will try to take advantage of the A's struggles in the opener of this set Friday night.

Oakland (32-22) fell 5-4 to Detroit on Thursday, losing for the sixth time in eight contests as its division lead dwindled from four games to 1 1/2 over second-place Los Angeles (30-23).

A's relievers have compiling a 4.34 ERA in the past seven games, and former closer Jim Johnson was booed off the field again after allowing two runs in the seventh inning Thursday. He has a 6.55 ERA in 22 outings after compiling a 2.94 mark with an AL-best 50 saves for Baltimore last year.

"What am I supposed to do?" Johnson said of being booed. "I don't know what to tell you. Balls are finding holes. I'm throwing pretty good pitches, I just feel like I'm in a little bit of bad luck. I don't think it's as bad as it really seems. I think everybody else thinks that way." Powered by OddsShark.com

The Angels pounded out 15 hits in Thursday's 7-5 win at Seattle, earning a split of that four-game series.

"There's a lot of weapons in here, one through nine, and guys have their special thing they bring to the team," said right fielder Kole Calhoun, who was 2 for 4 with three runs and two walks from the leadoff spot.

Mike Trout and Erick Aybar combined for six hits and five RBIs against the Mariners.

Trout is batting .417 with nine RBIs during a 10-game hitting streak, while Aybar has a .343 average while driving in nine runs over the past nine games.

Aybar has batted .362 in his past 15 games in Oakland, and Trout collected five hits with two doubles and a home run in the past two overall meetings with the A's.

The Angels, though, hit .227 while dropping two of three to Oakland at home April 14-16.

"We saw them early in the season, they were swinging the bats well then, and they continue to swing the bats well," A's manager Bob Melvin told the team's official website. "Better pitching now, not only in the bullpen but in the rotation."

Oakland's Drew Pomeranz (4-2, 1.38 ERA) will look to rebound from his first defeat since replacing the ineffective Dan Straily in the rotation.

The left-hander allowed two runs with four walks in four innings of a 3-1 loss at Toronto on Sunday. He had won his three previous starts while tossing 15 consecutive scoreless innings.

Pomeranz's only two appearances against the Angels have come in relief, and he's allowed one run in 4 1-3 innings. He tossed 1 2-3 before giving up a walkoff homer to Chris Iannetta in a 5-4, 12-inning defeat April 16.

The Angels' Garrett Richards (4-1, 3.00) has gone 0-2 with a 6.14 ERA in five career starts against the A's. However, the right-hander has been dominant over his last two starts at Oakland, allowing one run in 12 innings while not getting a decision.

Richards is 3-0 with a 1.38 ERA in six road starts this year.

He didn't receive a decision in his most recent outing at home Sunday, yielding three runs with seven strikeouts in seven innings of a 4-3 win over Kansas City.

Aybar hits 3-run homer to lead Angels to win

By AP Sports

SEATTLE (AP) -- Kole Calhoun thinks the Angels showed off their many talents in a win over the Mariners.

Erick Aybar hit a three-run homer, Matt Shoemaker pitched effectively into the sixth inning and the Los Angeles Angels beat the Seattle Mariners 7-5 on Thursday night.

"There's a lot of weapons in here, one through nine, and guys have their special thing they bring to the team," said Calhoun, who reached base safely four times from the leadoff spot.

Even with star Albert Pujols on the bench with a scheduled day off, the Angels had 15 hits, the fourth time in a week the club has had at least 11 hits in a game and its most in a game since getting 16 against the Yankees on April 25.

Recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake on Wednesday, Shoemaker (3-1) set down the side in order four times in 5 1-3 innings. He allowed three runs on four hits, equaled a career-high six strikeouts and did not walk a batter for the first time in five career starts.

"We were able to use all four pitches effectively, be able to throw them for strikes, get ahead of them," the right-hander said. "Definitely a confidence builder. Just knowing I'm able to pitch at this level."

Shoemaker didn't allow a baserunner until James Jones dropped a double in front of a diving Mike Trout in center field to lead off the fourth. One out later, Michael Saunders lined a two-run home run to right, cutting the deficit to 5-2.

Saunders added a sacrifice fly in the sixth, but the Angels bullpen cruised into the ninth until Kyle Seager hit a two-run home run off Fernando Salas. Ernesto Frieri came on to record two outs for his eighth save in 10 chances.

"Outside of Fernando Salas maybe just losing some counts in the ninth and giving up the home run, the bullpen did a terrific job, Kevin Jepsen especially," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

Mariners starter Brandon Maurer (1-4) lasted just four innings, allowing five runs on six hits and four walks. It's the fifth time in seven starts this season that Maurer has failed to reach the fifth inning.

"I agree he has struggled," Seattle manager Lloyd McClendon said of his young starter. "When you look at options you have to sit down and make sure you have a viable option. That is something Jack (Zduriencik, the general manager) and I will talk about and see where we go from here."

Los Angeles took a quick lead in the first when Trout's sacrifice fly to right field scored Calhoun. Trout drove in another run in the sixth with a sharp single up the middle, but the Angels, leading 6-2, were unable to blow the game open, as Seattle reliever Dominic Leone got two outs to leave a pair of runners stranded.

NOTES: OF Josh Hamilton, who sustained a bone bruise to his injured left thumb during a rehab assignment on May 22, worked out and took batting practice with the Angels. If all goes well, Hamilton is expected to join Triple-A Salt Lake in Tacoma on Friday. ... Mariners 2B Robinson Cano didn't feel well Thursday and was a late scratch. Stefen Romero replaced Cano in the lineup at DH and Nick Franklin moved to second base. ... RHP Taijuan Walker, on the 15-day DL with a right shoulder impingement, said he felt good after his first rehab start with Triple-A Tacoma on Wednesday and expects to throw a bullpen on Friday. "It's sore, obviously, it's sore," Walker said. "It's the normal soreness in the right spots. Sore in the right spots. It's nothing bad. I felt like I pitched yesterday."

FROM ESPN.COM

Six teams that need a good draft

By Christopher Crawford

No matter how many picks a team has or how strong a farm system is, every draft is important for every club, as it's a chance to replenish the farm system with depth and address needs without having to give up anything but cash.

That being said, there's also no question that a draft can take on added significance, be it because of where a team is selecting, how often it's selecting, and how its prospects have developed in the respective systems.

"No draft is created equal," an American League scout said. "You place importance on it every year, but it'd be foolish to say there aren't years where it becomes more important than others. The danger is that you recognize that and change your process, and in the many years I've been doing this, I've never seen that work. Just like any other year, you have to trust your scouts and talent evaluators and hope that everything works out."

And so with just one week to go until draft day, here's a look at six teams this year's draft is particularly important for, and some potential targets that could make it a draft to remember.

Houston Astros

You can't leave the team with the first pick in the draft off this list, even if this is the third time in a row that the Astros have had this selection and there's a pretty good chance that they'll have it again in 2015. Houston also has the 37th and 42nd picks on Thursday, so they'll have a chance to add three top-50 talents to a system that might already be the best in baseball.

"Anytime you have pick No. 1, it's something you have to hit on," a long-time former scouting director said. "Yes, you want to hit on every pick you have, but when you get a chance to acquire the very best player in the draft, there's a little added incentive.

"Whomever they take won't turn them into a winner in 2014 or 2015, but with the depth they have in that system, it could be a huge building block for something special."

Possible top picks: Brady Aiken, LHP, Cathedral Catholic HS (San Diego), Carlos Rodon, LHP, NC State, Alex Jackson, C/OF, Rancho Bernardo HS (San Diego)

Chicago Cubs

The Cubs are going to be one of the most interesting clubs to watch in the draft this year, as this is an

organization with enormous offensive potential in the system, but desperately needs to acquire pitching to compete in the NL Central by 2016. With pick No. 4, they may have to reach in order to fit their organizational needs if the clubs drafting ahead of them take pitchers with their selections, which is entirely possible.

Drafting for need isn't generally president Theo Epstein and GM Jed Hoyer's style, so they could chose to address the issue with their later picks, but it's unlikely they find the frontline starting pitching prospect the system needs with picks 45 or 78.

"If Aiken, Rodon and [Tyler] Kolek are off the board, I don't think you can take a pitcher," an AL East crosschecker said. "Two months ago you had [Jeff] Hoffman and [Tyler] Beede as options, but I think those are off the table. If they're fortunate enough to have [Aiken, Rodon or Kolek] fall to them, they're golden, but if not, they're going to have to get creative. They certainly have the right guys in the front office to do that, though."

Possible top picks: Rodon; Aaron Nola, RHP, Louisiana State; Max Pentecost, C, Kennesaw State; Nick Gordon, SS, Olympia HS (Orlando, Fla.).

Miami Marlins

This draft could be a huge opportunity for a farm system that ranks near the middle of the pack, as Miami has four selections on Day 1 and more money to spend than any club. The Marlins have taken collegiate players with their last two first-round selections, but over their history they've had a strong lean toward prep players with high upside, and this could be the perfect draft for them to go back to that strategy and load up with young talents that could help them compete for the NL East in a few seasons.

There are rumors that ownership is mandating that they take Rodon if he's still on the board at No. 2, but the strength of this draft is in the prep ranks, and they have a chance to add intriguing upside talents with picks 36, 39 and 43.

Possible top picks: Rodon, Kolek, Jackson

Milwaukee Brewers and Los Angeles Angels

These two teams are linked together because it's an important draft for both clubs for the same reasons: These are the two worst farm systems in baseball, and assuming they don't want that to continue to be the case, they can use this year's draft to help rebuild their respective situations.

"There's no better way to build a system than through the draft," an NL East scout said. "Sure there's a lot of volatility and, unfortunately, you have to be bad in order to procure the elite talent. But if you look at some of the best farm systems out there, like Boston and St. Louis, you know that you can pick up elite talents through the draft no matter where you pick."

"In the case of [Los Angeles and Milwaukee], they haven't had a lot of picks because of free agency, but I don't think they've done a great job when it comes to process, either. With picks in the middle of the first round, they are very likely to pick up a guy who's going to rank at the top of their system. That's not the goal, but it's a start."

Possible top picks for Milwaukee: Pentecost; Kyle Freeland, LHP, Evansville; Grant Holmes, RHP, Conway (S.C.) HS

Possible top picks for Los Angeles: Kyle Schwarber, C, Indiana; Nick Burdi, RHP, Louisville; Bradley Zimmer, OF, San Francisco.

Toronto Blue Jays

When you trade away the majority of your quality prospects in trades for the likes of R.A. Dickey, Mark Buehrle and Jose Reyes, and you fail to sign two of your three previous first-round picks, and you miss on a large portion of the selections you do sign like the Blue Jays have, your system is going to be in trouble.

Fortunately for the Jays, they have two picks in the top 11 and close to \$9.5 million to spend in the draft, and a chance to rectify some of those errors.

"I think this is a huge draft for them," an NL scout said. "And I am fascinated to see what they do, because there are so many different names attached to them, and not similar type players either. Ideally, they can take a chance on a guy like Jeff Hoffman or a volatile arm like Touki Toussaint or a guy like Jacob Gatewood. But I imagine one of these picks will be a safety guy. That being said, I've seen them take as many high-risk, high-reward guys as anyone in baseball, so I could see them going that route again."

Possible top picks: Hoffman; Trea Turner, SS, NC State; Sean Reid-Foley, RHP, Sandalwood HS (Jacksonville)

FROM FANGRAPH'S

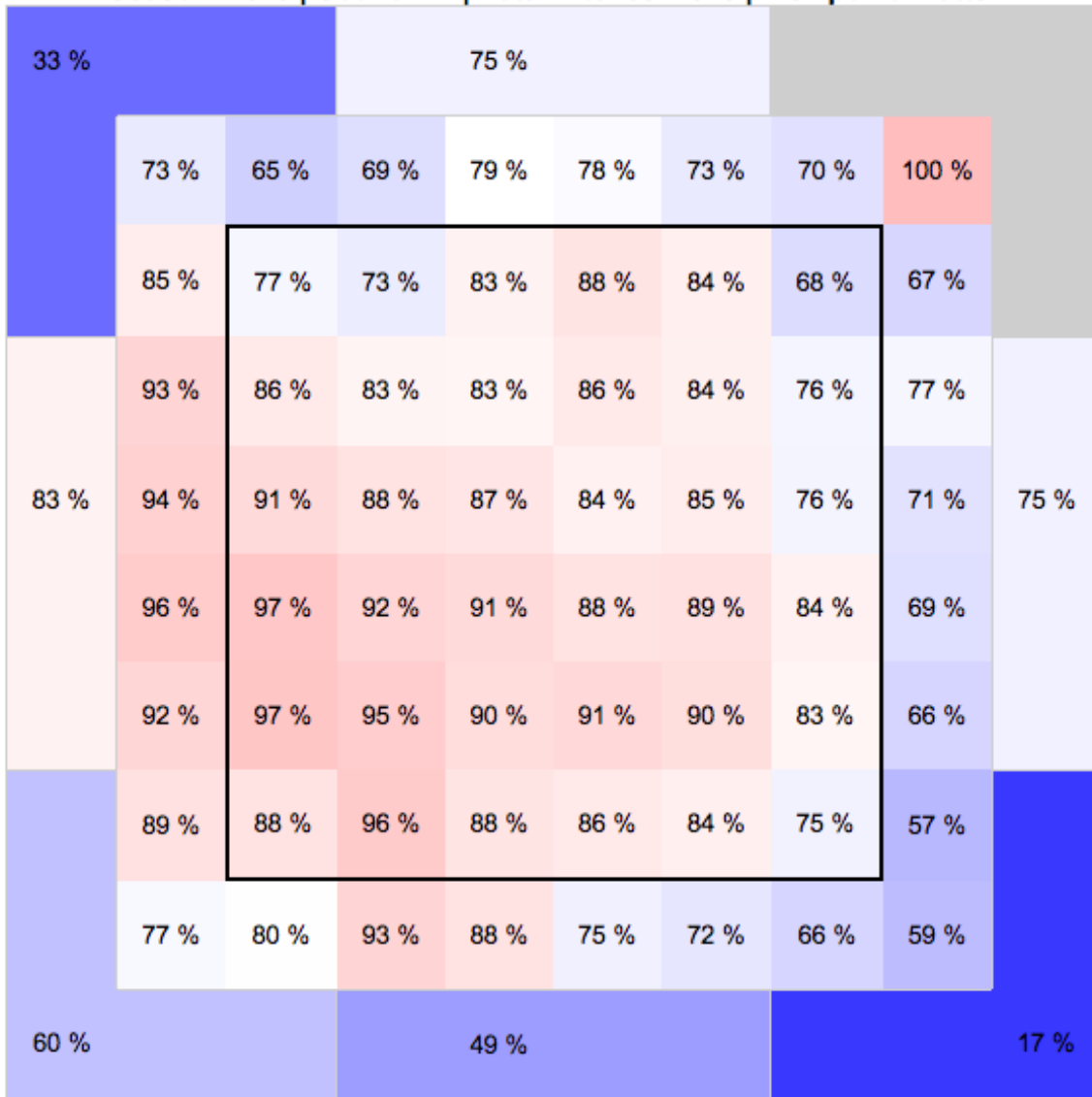
Mike Trout's "Struggles", Graphed

By Dave Cameron

Mike Trout has a .386 wOBA and a 151 wRC+. He's not exactly hitting poorly, but he is striking out a lot more than he has previously, and relative to his own previous performances, a .386 wOBA is perhaps a minor disappointment. Now that David Appelman has released our fancy new heatmaps, we can see exactly where Trout's trouble areas have been.

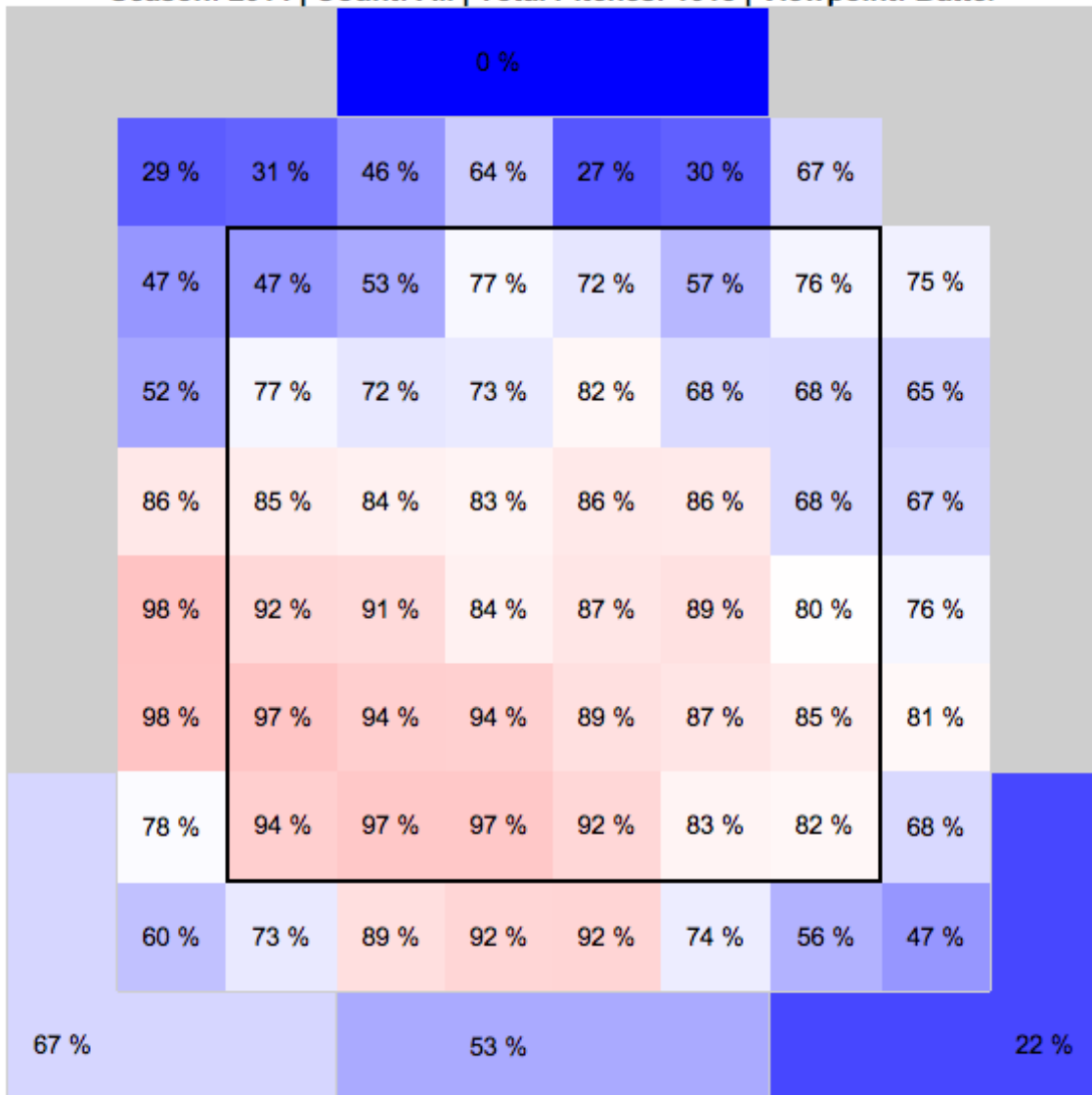
First, here's Trout's contact rate map for 2013.

Mike Trout Contact% vs All Pitchers
Season: 2013 | Count: All | Total Pitches: 2973 | Viewpoint: Batter



And now here's that contact rate map for 2014.

Mike Trout Contact% vs All Pitchers
Season: 2014 | Count: All | Total Pitches: 1015 | Viewpoint: Batter



Look at the upper half of the strike zone. Last year, he was making contact on pitches towards the top of the zone at around an 80% clip, and when pitchers elevated in, his contact rates were in the 90% range. This year, he's in the 70% contact range on pitches towards the top of the zone, and pitches up and in have been especially problematic.

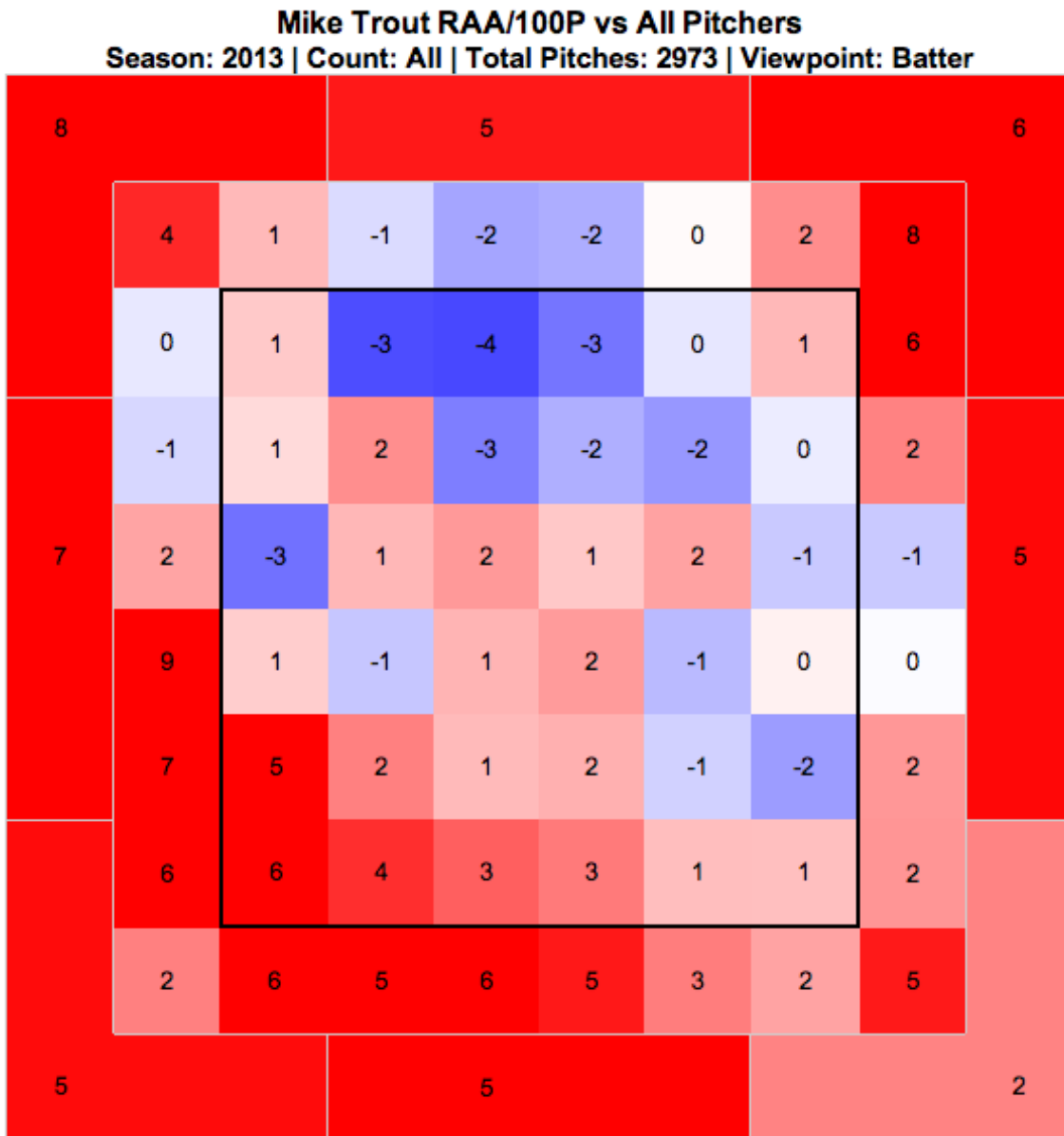
Of course, a lower contact rate isn't necessarily worse, depending on what kind of contact a hitter makes when he does hit the ball. In reality, what you really want to look at is total production in a location, taking into account both the negative outcomes like swinging strikes and the positive outcomes on balls in play.

And that's why I love one of our new heat maps in particular. You'll find it labeled as "RAA/100P", which stands for Runs Above Average per 100 pitches, but essentially, it's a linear weights metric that gives you the sum of a batters outcomes in a specific zone.

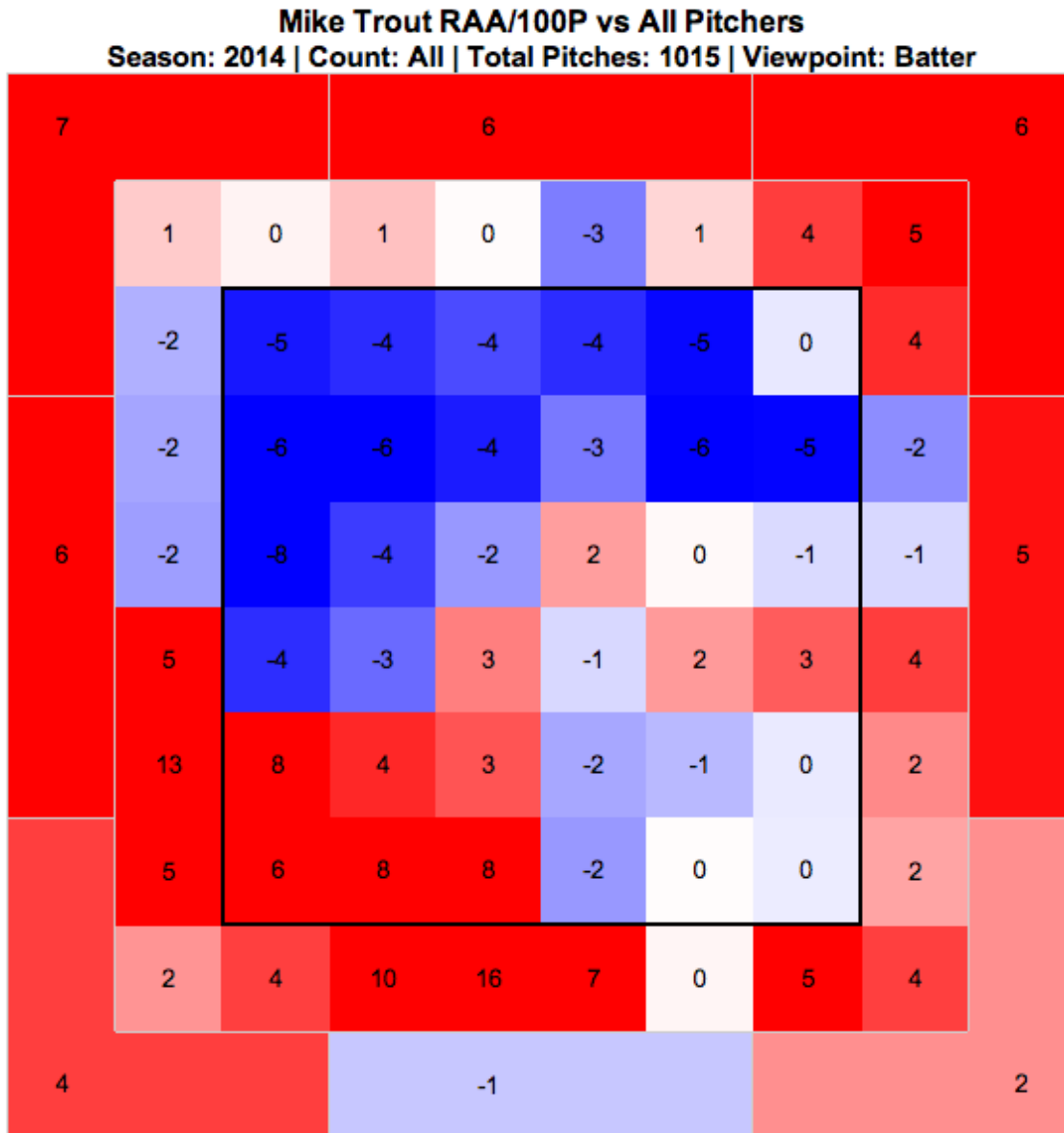
If a batter never swings at a pitch out of the zone, he may be hitting .000/.000/.000 on pitches in that area, but it's still a very high reward location for him because of the large numbers of called balls, which generate value for the hitter. By adding up the values of not just the balls in play, or even just the swings, but of all pitches in that specific area, we can see where each hitter (or pitcher) is generating most of their value.

Here are Trout's heat maps again, but this time, we're looking at the linear weights value of these locations.

Here is 2013.



And now 2014.



Trout is an absolute monster on pitches down and in, and that hasn't changed this year. If you pitch him in that low-and-in part of the zone, or even if you get it in off the plate a little bit, he's going to crush you.

But look at the top of the zone this year compared to last year. He's getting eaten up — relative to 2013 Mike Trout, anyway — on pitches up in the zone, and particularly that up-and-in area where his contact rate has really dropped. Previously, Trout was making pitchers pay for attacking the top end of the zone, but this year, they're getting those pitches by him.

Why that's become a weak spot for him this year is a question for Trout and the Angels hitting coaches, and not one we can answer. But, thanks to these RAA/100 heat maps, we can now identify where in the zone a hitter is having success or failure. And that's why I'm going to be using these all the time.

FROM SPORTS XCHANGE

Team Report - LOS ANGELES ANGELS

SEATTLE -- The first time Albert Pujols was out of the lineup in 2014, it had nothing to do with his health.

That qualifies as a win for the Los Angeles Angels, as much as their 7-5 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Thursday.

Pujols sat after starting each of the team's first 52 games. His stamina, even more than his 14 home runs, is a testament to how well his season is going. The 34-year-old slugger's past health problems are becoming a non-issue, and he is turning into an ironman this year.

Not that the Angels missed Pujols much Thursday. Center fielder Mike Trout slid down one spot in the order to Pujols' usual spot in the batting order, No. 3, and went 3-for-3 with two RBIs. The Angels piled up 15 hits, two short of their season high, and got five RBIs from the top three hitters in the order. Right fielder Kole Calhoun, shortstop Erick Aybar and Trout went a combined 8-for-12.

Pujols likely will be back in the lineup when the Angels travel to Oakland for a weekend series, and there might be another big bat returning to the team soon thereafter.

Before Thursday's game, outfielder Josh Hamilton took batting practice for the second consecutive day. Hamilton could resume his rehab stint at Triple-A Salt Lake as soon as Friday, and there is a chance he'll come off the disabled list as soon as next week.

Hamilton has been out since April 9, when he tore a ligament in his left thumb while diving into first base. He began a rehab assignment at Salt Lake last week but experienced a setback when he got jammed on a pitch and sustained a bone bruise to the thumb.

Getting Hamilton back in the lineup, alongside a healthy and slugging Pujols, would give the Angels a big boost.

NOTES, QUOTES

RECORD: 30-23

STREAK: Won one

NEXT: Angels (RHP Garrett Richards, 4-1, 3.00 ERA) at A's (LHP Drew Pomeranz, 4-2, 1.38 ERA)

PLAYER NOTES:

--1B Albert Pujols was not in the lineup Thursday, marking the first time all season that he got a night off. He started all 52 games while batting in the No. 3 spot in the order in every one of them before the series finale at Seattle. Pujols is expected to be back in the lineup for Friday's game in Oakland.

--CF Mike Trout, usually the Angels' No. 2 hitter, was moved down one spot to third because 1B Albert Pujols had the night off. He made the most of it, going 3-for-3 with two RBIs. Trout is hitting .417 in his past 36 at-bats after coming out of a 9-for-59 (.152) slump.

--OF Josh Hamilton (thumb) took batting practice with the team again before Thursday's game, and he might resume his rehab stint with Triple-A Salt Lake on Friday. If all goes well, Hamilton could be back in the Angels' lineup for Tuesday's game against Houston.

--RF Kole Calhoun made some noise at the top of the Angels' order Thursday. He drew a first-inning walk and came around to score on a Mike Trout sacrifice fly to give the Angels a 1-0 lead. He added a single, a walk and a double on his next three plate appearances on a 2-for-4 night. "I was just trying to do the things leadoff hitters do," he said. "I was trying to take some pitches. ... That's something personally I need to do, and it's also the best thing for this team."

--DH Raul Ibanez ended an 0-for-10 slump with his second triple of the season Thursday. With one out in the top of the fifth inning, Ibanez hit a loping fly ball into shallow center field. When Seattle CF James Jones dived and missed the ball, it rolled to the wall, allowing the 41-year-old Ibanez to run all the way to third base. Ibanez was stranded after a popout and inning-ending groundout. Two innings later, Ibanez hit the ball even more solidly but came up empty when Jones made a nice catch against the wall in right-center field.

--RHP Garrett Richards has lasted exactly seven innings in seven of his 10 starts this season, including each of his past four. He has not recorded an out in the eighth inning season. Richards is scheduled to start against the A's on Friday night. Richards started once against Oakland this season, going -- you guessed it -- seven innings while getting touched up for five runs on eight hits in a no-decision.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "They did a great job. It is good to see Kole (Calhoun) get some hits and get on base as much as he did. Erick (Aybar) and Mike (Trout) followed suit. We had lots of opportunities, and we cashed in on enough of them and held on." -- Manager Mike Scioscia, on the top three in his batting order Thursday. The trio went a combined 8-for-12 in the Angels' 7-5 win over the Seattle Mariners.

ROSTER REPORT

MEDICAL WATCH:

--LHP Sean Burnett (torn left ulnar collateral ligament) went on the 15-day disabled list May 29. He will miss the rest of the season, and he might undergo his second Tommy John surgery in less than a year.

--OF Josh Hamilton (torn ulnar collateral ligament in left thumb) went on the 15-day disabled list April 9. He underwent surgery April 11. He began a rehab assignment with Triple-A Salt Lake on May 22, but his thumb was jammed on a pitch. He was diagnosed with a bone bruise May 26, but he took batting practice May 28-29. He might resume his rehab with Salt Lake during the weekend of May 30-June 1, and if all goes well, he could be activated June 3.

--INF Ian Stewart (left hand bruise) went on the 15-day disabled list May 12. He began a rehab assignment with Triple-A Salt Lake from May 25.

--RHP Dane De La Rosa (sore right shoulder) went on the 15-day disabled list April 15. He made four rehab appearances for Triple-A Salt Lake from May 4-10, then shut down the rehab assignment May 14 due to shoulder tightness. He received a cortisone injection May 14, and he threw a bullpen session May 18. He re-started his Triple-A rehab assignment May 21.

--RHP Ryan Brasier (right elbow strain) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to March 21, and he was transferred to the 60-day DL on April 16.

--LHP Brian Moran (left elbow inflammation) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to March 21, and he was transferred to the 60-day DL on April 13. He underwent season-ending Tommy John surgery the week of April 14.

Team Report - OAKLAND ATHLETICS

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A's right-hander Jim Johnson's nightmare at the O.co Coliseum continued Thursday afternoon in a 5-4 loss to the Detroit Tigers.

Johnson, who lost his closer's job early this season, gave up two runs on three hits in the seventh inning as the Tigers extended their lead to 5-2. Once again, he was booed soundly by the home fans after he walked off the field after another rough outing.

"I feel like I've been throwing the ball well. I just haven't had any luck lately," Johnson said. "I don't know what to tell you. Balls are finding holes. I'm throwing pretty good pitches. I just feel like I'm in a little bit of bad luck. I don't think it's as bad as it really seems. I think everybody else thinks that way."

Johnson's numbers at the Coliseum look particularly bad. Coming into Thursday's game, he had gone 0-2 with a 13.50 ERA in 10 appearances in Oakland this season. On the road, he's 3-0 with a 1.98 ERA.

The A's acquired Johnson from Baltimore in a trade on Dec. 2, fully expecting him to be their closer and replace Grant Balfour. Johnson had 122 career saves for Baltimore, including 74 last season. But in the A's season-opener against Cleveland on March 31 at the Coliseum, Johnson gave up two runs on two hits in one-third of an inning and took the loss in a 2-0 defeat. He was booed off the field that night and again on April 2, when he blew a save in a 6-4 loss to Cleveland, yielding three runs on three hits in two-thirds of an inning.

"He's having a more difficult time here at home," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's just not getting the same results at home as he is on the road."

Johnson retired Tigers second baseman Ian Kinsler, the first batter he faced Thursday, on a ground ball to third baseman Josh Donaldson. But right fielder Don Kelly grounded a single to right past a diving Eric Sogard at second, and first baseman Miguel Cabrera singled sharply to left through the hole at shortstop. Designated hitter Victor Martinez smoked a double down the right-field line, bringing both runners home.

Johnson retired the next two batters he faced then left the field to boos.

"What am I supposed to do?" Johnson said.

NOTES, QUOTES

RECORD: 32-22

STREAK: Lost one

NEXT: Angels (RHP Garrett Richards, 4-1, 3.00 ERA) at Athletics (Drew Pomeranz, 4-2, 1.38 ERA)

PLAYER NOTES:

--RHP Jesse Chavez allowed three runs and eight hits, matching his season high, over six innings Thursday and lost his second straight game as the A's fell 5-4 to the Detroit Tigers. Chavez struck out three, walked two and had runners on base in every inning he pitched except a one-two-three fourth. Chavez had a 1.89 ERA at the end of April, but that has climbed to 2.78.

--INF Nick Punto (left calf strain) was in the starting lineup at shortstop Thursday afternoon against the Tigers after missing five games and he hit his first home run as an Athletic, a two-run shot in the fourth inning off RHP Rick Porcello. Punto homered for the first time since Aug. 12 last season with the Dodgers. It was his 18th career home run in 13 seasons and snapped a 51-game homerless streak. Punto was 2-for-14 for his career against Porcello before homering. Regular starting SS Jed Lowrie, who's still dealing some neck stiffness, was out of the lineup. Punto made his sixth start at shortstop and has also started 15 times at second base. He entered the game batting .233 with six RBIs. Punto went 1-for-2 and walked three times, tying his career high, in a 5-4 loss to the Tigers.

--C John Jaso went 2-for-3 Thursday and is batting .350 (21-for-60) with four home runs and 10 RBIs in 17 games in May. His four homers are the most Jaso has hit during a month in his career. He hit .236 with one home run and four RBIs in 22 games in April.

--SS Jed Lowrie was out of the starting lineup Thursday afternoon against Detroit for just the sixth time this season. Lowrie pinch hit in the ninth inning with runners on first and second but grounded out to first base for the final out in the A's 5-4 loss. INF Nick Punto started at shortstop in his place. "He's still dealing a little bit with his neck issue," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Gets some stiffness, so this was a good time, once we felt like Punto (left calf strain) was fully healthy, to give Jed a day off after a night game and get Punto back in a game." Over his previous seven games after missing two with neck stiffness, Lowrie hit .130 (3-for-23).

--RHP Ryan Cook (right forearm strain) threw his second bullpen session Thursday since going on the disabled list on May 8 and said he expects to begin a rehab assignment Saturday with Class A Stockton. Cook, who threw around 20 pitches in a bullpen session Tuesday, had a more extensive session Thursday. "We did a little different thing as if I was warming up to go into the game, sit down, throw my eight warmups and my inning, just as if I'd gone into a game," Cook said. "So it was a few more pitches." A's manager Bob Melvin said Cook threw 20 pitches "at a high intensity" after his warmup tosses. "Felt great," Melvin said. "So we'll see how he feels when he comes in tomorrow, but if everything is good there then potentially the next one will be out somewhere."

QUOTE TO NOTE: "We had plenty of opportunities. We had some situational at-bats where we didn't come through." -- A's manager Bob Melvin, after Thursday's loss to the Tigers.

ROSTER REPORT**MEDICAL WATCH:**

--INF Nick Punto (left calf strain) was injured May 23, and he sat out his fifth consecutive game May 28. He started at shortstop May 29.

--RHP Ryan Cook (right forearm strain) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to May 8. An MRI revealed no ligament damage. He resumed throwing off flat ground the week of May 19-25, and he threw a bullpen session May 27, using all his pitches. He threw more a extensive bullpen session May 29. Providing he encounters no setbacks, Cook expects to begin a rehab assignment May 31 with Class A Stockton.

--INF Jake Elmore (strained left quad) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to March 28, and he was transferred to the 60-day DL on May 18. He began a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on April 24 but appeared in only two games before suffering a minor setback. Elmore's condition was improved as of May 6. He is scheduled to take some at-bats in a simulated game May 29 at Triple-A Sacramento.

--RHP A.J. Griffin (right flexor tendinitis) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to March 21, and he was transferred to the 60-day DL on May 4. He underwent season-ending Tommy John surgery April 30.

--LHP Eric O'Flaherty (Tommy John surgery in May 2013) went on the 60-day disabled list Feb. 17. He threw 35 pitches in a bullpen session April 22. He threw a 30-pitch bullpen session May 6 and threw to hitters May 10 and May 13. He pitched to hitters again May 20. He threw 15 pitches in a simulated inning in Arizona on May 24. He will pitch a simulated game May 29 at Triple-A Sacramento

--RHP Jarrod Parker (torn right ulnar collateral ligament) went on the 60-day disabled list March 20. He had a second Tommy John surgery March 24, and he will miss the entire season.

ROTATION:

RHP Sonny Gray

LHP Scott Kazmir

RHP Jesse Chavez

LHP Tommy Milone

LHP Drew Pomeranz

BULLPEN:

LHP Sean Doolittle (closer)

RHP Jim Johnson

RHP Luke Gregerson

RHP Dan Otero

LHP Fernando Abad

RHP Fernando Rodriguez

LHP Jeff Francis

CATCHERS:

John Jaso

Derek Norris

INFIELDERS:

1B Brandon Moss

2B Eric Sogard

SS Jed Lowrie

3B Josh Donaldson

INF Nick Punto

INF Alberto Callaspo

INF/OF Kyle Blanks

OUTFIELDERS:

LF Yoenis Cespedes

CF Coco Crisp

RF Josh Reddick

OF Craig Gentry