

Clips

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Garrett Richards' injury means Angels need to win AL West

By Bill Shaikin

There should not have been a sense of urgency surrounding this weekend's series between the Angels and Oakland Athletics.

The Angels have the best record in the major leagues. The A's have the second-best record. The teams might joust over the American League West championship, but the A's have a six-game cushion in the race for a playoff spot. If the Angels win the AL West, the A's would figure to get a wild-card playoff spot, and vice versa.

However, as the two teams open a three-game series in Oakland on Friday, followed by a four-game series next week in Anaheim, Garrett Richards' season-ending knee surgery has changed the focus for the Angels.

The Angels need to win the AL West.

To the division winner: a spot in the division series. To the wild-card teams: a one-game playoff for a spot in the division series.

With Richards injured, the Angels do not have the kind of dominant starting pitcher desired for a sudden-death game.

According to the ERA+ statistic, in which 100 represents a league-average starting pitcher, Richards is the only Angels starter significantly above average.

Jered Weaver, the Angels' longtime ace, rates exactly average, according to the statistic. C.J. Wilson, who signed for \$77.5 million as a free agent in 2011, has an ERA+ of 80. Dan Haren, the Dodgers' struggling veteran starter, has an ERA+ of 78.

In a wild-card game, the A's could turn to Jon Lester, or Scott Kazmir, or Sonny Gray, or Jeff Samardzija. The Seattle Mariners have options in Felix Hernandez and Hisashi Iwakuma. The Detroit Tigers? David Price or Max Scherzer.

The Angels? Just win the division, baby.

After a shutout and a sweep in Boston, Angels now focus on the A's

By Mike DiGiovanna

The Angels completed their 2-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox in Fenway Park at 10:22 p.m. EDT Thursday. They showered, dressed and took the bus to Logan Airport for a six-hour flight to San Francisco.

With any luck, they'll get to their hotel by 4 a.m. PDT in advance of a critical three-game series at Oakland, which begins Friday night.

"I can think of a lot more ideal circumstances to go into a series against the A's," right fielder Kole Calhoun said after the Angels won for the eighth time in nine games and increased their division lead over Oakland to two games. "But we can't do anything about it.

"Everybody's going to have a lot of adrenaline Friday night. But you have to get some sleep on the plane. Get some rest Friday and come to the park ready to go."

Teams often schedule day games or 4 p.m. starts on getaway days for opponents, but the Red Sox didn't do the Angels any favors by starting Thursday's game at 7 p.m. Sunday's game in Oakland was also moved from 1 to 5 p.m. to accommodate ESPN.

"There are some things that go along with being a good team," reliever Joe Smith said. "They want you on TV. They want to draw at the gate, and the best way is by having night games."

The Angels flew Friday starter Hector Santiago to the Bay Area earlier Thursday so he could get a normal night of sleep. For the rest of the Angels, the skies probably seemed more friendly after Matt Shoemaker held the Red Sox to one hit in 7²/₃ innings and struck out nine Thursday.

Shoemaker hit Brock Holt with a pitch to start the first. The right-hander, using pinpoint control of his split-fingered fastball, retired the next 20 batters before Will Middlebrooks broke up his no-hit bid with a double to left with two outs in the seventh.

"In one word, he was sensational," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "I don't know if Shoe has put pitches together like that. He's having a great year, but he was locked in today. Just a great mixture of changing speeds, working both sides of the plate."

Shoemaker, who threw a career-high 116 pitches, improved to 12-4 with a 3.56 earned run average. He was signed as an undrafted free agent in 2008, and few expected him to play more than a long-relief role. He is now tied with Masahiro Tanaka of the New York Yankees for most wins by a rookie.

He also gave the Angels an emotional lift one night after their best pitcher, Garrett Richards, suffered a season-ending knee injury.

"It's important," Scioscia said. "There's going to be a lot of attention on our rotation with Garrett out. To have Matty step up and pitch that deep on a night our bullpen was really tired ... you can't say enough about what he did."

Shoemaker said Richards "was heavy on my mind" up until game time.

"Then I tried to focus on pitching, because that's what G does," Shoemaker said. "It's a detrimental loss, but we're all going to fight hard to pick him up. We're just going to get stronger from it, I really think so."

Angels' Garrett Richards has torn knee tendon, will miss pennant drive

By Mike DiGiovanna

Garrett Richards suffered a torn patellar tendon in his left knee and will undergo surgery Friday, a procedure that will sideline the Angels right-hander for six to nine months and could deal a severe blow to the team's pennant hopes.

If the Angels let it.

"Look, we can go in one of two directions," catcher Chris Iannetta said before Thursday night's 2-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox, which sealed the Angels' first four-game sweep in Fenway Park since 1962. "We can absorb the loss [of Richards] and play as hard as we can, though everyone else needs to step up some more.

"Or we could say, 'Hey, you know what? Spring training starts in five or six months; we'll see you then.' Which one is it going to be? I think everyone knows the answer. We have no choice but to keep going."

Richards, 26, the team's best starting pitcher, suffered the injury in the second inning Wednesday, when he caught a spike in the dirt while running to cover first base on a potential double-play ball and fell awkwardly to the ground.

Medical personnel tended to Richards for eight minutes before he was wheeled off the field on a stretcher. Richards flew to Los Angeles on Thursday morning, and an MRI test confirmed the injury, which could cause Richards to miss the start of 2015.

"Obviously, it's devastating news for Garrett," General Manager Jerry Dipoto said. "It's a very difficult pill to swallow. Our hearts go out to him, and we're all rooting for him. But we don't think it's going to affect his 2015 season. Garrett is young. He's in great shape. He should be OK."

But will the Angels? Veteran left-hander Wade LeBlanc was recalled from triple-A Salt Lake on Thursday, and he will replace Richards in the rotation, his first start scheduled for Monday against Miami.

LeBlanc, 30, went 10-3 with a 4.00 earned-run average in 21 starts for Salt Lake and pitched particularly well in his last nine games, going 5-1 with a 2.89 ERA.

"The guys in the organization are very pleased with the way he's throwing," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's got a chance to come here and shut a team down by mixing and matching and changing speeds."

He is no Richards, though. Richards went 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA and 164 strikeouts in 168 2/3 innings, and his dominating stuff — 96-mph fastball, sharp-breaking slider, big overhand curve — would match up well with the best pitchers in the league, especially in the playoffs or a one-game wild-card playoff.

"You're never going to replace a guy like Garrett with one pitcher," Scioscia said. "But it doesn't mean we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

Dipoto, who made one trade Thursday, acquiring infielder Gordon Beckham from the Chicago White Sox for a player to be named later or cash, said he is "open" to acquiring a starting pitcher, but that's difficult during the August waiver period and with the Angels having baseball's best record.

A National League pitcher such as New York Mets right-hander Bartolo Colon would have to pass through 28 teams, and an American League pitcher would have to pass through 13 teams before the Angels could claim him.

"We want to make ourselves better ... but picking up those household names, the top-of-the-rotation guys, that's not going to happen in August," Dipoto said. "We're realistic about what may be out there."

Angels' Matt Shoemaker dominates Boston Red Sox in 2-0 win

By Mike DiGiovanna

KEY MOMENT: Seven outs away from a no-hitter, Angels pitcher Matt Shoemaker hung a 2-and-2 split-fingered fastball to Will Middlebrooks, who lined a double to left for Boston's only hit. "It was supposed be down, but it was belt-high, middle-in," Shoemaker said. "He roped it down the line. Definitely an unfortunate pitch given the circumstances."

AT THE PLATE: Kole Calhoun singled in the first and scored on Josh Hamilton's double to left. Erick Aybar doubled in the seventh, stole third and scored on Calhoun's sacrifice fly. Aybar and Howie Kendrick each had three hits.

ON THE MOUND: Shoemaker didn't realize he had a no-hitter "until the fifth or sixth inning," he said. Not so for catcher Chris Iannetta. "I was looking at the scoreboard in the third," he said. "I don't pull any punches. I know what's going on. I kept telling myself, 'There's no way he's going to do it, there's no way I'm going to call a no-hitter.' Reverse psychology." Mike Morin got the last out of the eighth, and Jason Grilli retired the side in order in the ninth.

EJECT BUTTON: Albert Pujols complained about a called strike in the sixth and was ejected by umpire Andy Fletcher upon returning to the dugout, his first ejection since 2005 and sixth of his career. "I didn't say anything from the dugout," Pujols said. "I grabbed some water, and they told me I got thrown out." Manager Mike Scioscia got tossed for complaining about the ejection. "He threw Albert out from 80 feet away," Scioscia said. "I thought it was inappropriate."

TRADE WINDS: The Angels acquired infielder Gordon Beckham, 27, from the White Sox for a player to be named or cash. Beckham, who will join the team Saturday, will provide a right-handed-hitting option at second, third, shortstop and designated hitter. He's hitting .221 with 24 doubles, seven homers and 36 RBIs and .309 (30 for 107) against left-handers.

UP NEXT: Left-hander Hector Santiago (3-7, 3.46 ERA) will oppose Oakland right-hander Sonny Gray (12-7, 2.99 ERA) at Oakland Coliseum at 7 p.m. On the air: TV: FS West. Radio: 830, 1330.

Trade to replace Garrett Richards? Not so easy for Angels

By Mike DiGiovanna

As the reality of Garrett Richards' season-ending knee injury set in Thursday, so did this reality: the Angels cannot make a trade to replace their ace.

They can make a trade, to be sure. But the relevant question for the Angels is this: Can they trade for a better pitcher than journeyman Wade LeBlanc, and would the price be worth what might be a minimal upgrade?

Richards was one of the eight best starting pitchers in the American League, by several measures.

Elite pitchers generally are not traded in August, when players must be made available on waivers in advance of any deal. The complete list of starting pitchers traded or moved on a waiver claim this month: Kevin Correia and Roberto Hernandez, to the Dodgers; Jacob Turner, to the Chicago Cubs; Jerome Williams, to the Philadelphia Phillies.

The Dodgers twice acquired Hall of Fame pitcher Greg Maddux in August. Maddux was 40 the first time, 42 the second time. The Dodgers also acquired Joe Blanton in August.

In order to fill Richards' spot in the rotation, the Angels could consider two New York Mets pitchers -- Jon Niese (7-8, 3.50 earned-run average), who reportedly has cleared waivers, and Bartolo Colon (11-10, 3.85). According to the ERA+ statistic, Niese is a league-average pitcher, Colon a below-average pitcher.

Colon, 41, is owed \$12.5 million through 2015. Niese, 27, is owed \$18 million through 2016.

The Mets could let Colon go on waivers, sticking the Angels with the entire \$12.5-million bill. Of course, since every other team knows the Angels need a starter, all it would take is one team to claim him and block the Angels from getting him. The Oakland Athletics probably would want to keep Colon out of Anaheim -- and, by having the best record in the American League, the Angels get last priority in claiming National League players.

However, if the Mets or any other team decided to engage in discussions about trading a pitcher, the Angels' perilously thin farm system could become an issue. The Angels traded five of their better prospects -- from a system already ranked as the worst in baseball -- to acquire relievers Huston Street and Joe Thatcher.

The Angels added to their major league depth Thursday, acquiring infielder Gordon Beckham from the Chicago White Sox for a player to be named or cash. It is possible the Angels could try to use surplus major league talent in a trade for a starter.

Angels acquire veteran infielder Gordon Beckham from White Sox

By Mike DiGiovanna

The Angels made a trade Thursday, but it wasn't for a starting pitcher to replace the injured Garrett Richards.

The team acquired veteran utility infielder Gordon Beckham from the Chicago White Sox for a player to be named or cash.

General Manager Jerry Dipoto said Beckham, who will join the Angels in time for Saturday night's game against the Oakland Athletics, will give the team an extra bat to counter left-handed pitching. The A's are scheduled to start left-handers Jon Lester on Saturday and Scott Kazmir on Sunday.

Beckham, 27, can play second base, third base and shortstop. He has appeared in 101 games for the White Sox this season, batting .221 (86 for 390) with 24 doubles, seven home runs and 36 runs batted in, but he is hitting .309 (30 for 107) against left-handers.

Beckham's best seasons in Chicago came as a rookie in 2009, when he hit .270 with 14 homers, 28 doubles and 63 RBIs, and 2012, when he hit .234 with 16 homers, 24 doubles and 60 RBIs.

He also owns two of the top three best single-season fielding percentages by a second baseman in White Sox history, .9899 in 2012 and .9889 in 2011 and was Chicago's recipient of the Wilson Defensive Player of the Year award in 2013.

Beckham, who makes \$4.2 million this season, is entering his final season of arbitration in 2015, and his presence could give the Angels the flexibility of packaging a right-handed hitter such as C.J. Cron, Grant Green or even second baseman Howie Kendrick in a trade for a starting pitcher.

But the chances of acquiring a high-impact arm in August, after the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline, is slim.

"Picking up front-of-the-rotation, All-Star guys is not going to happen," Dipoto said. "Between now and Sept. 1, we'll be as open as we can be. But we're realistic about what may be out there."

Wade LeBlanc to replace injured Garrett Richards in Angels rotation

By Mike DiGiovanna

Wade LeBlanc will get the first crack at replacing the injured Garrett Richards in the Angels rotation. The veteran left-hander was recalled from triple-A Salt Lake on Thursday and will be available out of the bullpen for Thursday night's game against the Boston Red Sox.

LeBlanc, 30, who was 10-3 with a 4.00 earned-run average in 21 starts at Salt Lake, is expected to take Richards' rotation spot and start against the Miami Marlins on Monday night in Anaheim.

The Angels, who needed 7 1/3 innings from their bullpen in Wednesday night's 8-3 win over the Red Sox, also recalled right-hander Cam Bedrosian to bolster the bullpen after demoting outfielder Brennan Boesch to triple-A Wednesday night.

Richards, who injured the patellar area of his left knee covering first base in the second inning Wednesday night, was undergoing an MRI test in Los Angeles on Thursday.

His 2014 season appears over, and there is a good chance he will need surgery to repair his patellar tendon, a procedure that requires a three-to-six-month recovery.

LeBlanc has a 20-32 record and 4.56 ERA in the big leagues and has pitched only 7 1/3 innings in the majors this season, 6 1/3 of them coming for the Angels in a May 30 game against Oakland. His other inning came for the New York Yankees.

LeBlanc has been Salt Lake's best starting pitcher in recent weeks, with a 5-1 record and 2.89 ERA over his last nine games.

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Harmonson: Angels, not A's, in driver's seat in AL West

By Todd Harmonson

Southern California vs. Northern California.

Seven times in the next 10 days.

Loser gets the Raiders.

But wait, wasn't this Angels-Athletics rivalry decided nearly a month ago?

Brilliant Billy Beane used Jedi mind tricks – and Yoenis Cespedes – to lock up the AL West on July 31, right? Jon Lester made the Athletics a lock to reach and likely win the World Series, at least according to every pundit who wasn't busy handing the Tigers the trade deadline title.

Funny how championships determined that day usually mean as much as they do for the winners of the Winter Meetings World Series.

The experts hammered the Angels for failing to add a top-of-the-rotation starter the way Oakland and Detroit did, an argument that picked up even more validity Wednesday when Garrett Richards tore his left patellar tendon and was lost for six to nine months.

That led to the second time this season the Angels were eliminated in 140-character increments, only this one came with gut-wrenching video attached.

And, yes, the loss of Richards is devastating to a team that might want to consider trotting out its stellar relievers one inning at a time from the start of every fifth game.

Yet when the Angels take the field at O.co Coliseum on Friday, they will do so with the best record in baseball and a 2-game lead over the Athletics.

This is not over for the Angels. The drama is just beginning.

With 126 games done and 36 to play, including 10 against Oakland, Mike Scioscia's team almost certainly is headed for the postseason – at least for one day in the dreaded win-or-else wild-card game – and still is in a strong position to win the AL West and reach the Division Series.

A long run in the playoffs is far less likely, but a team that walked away without sniffing the postseason the past four years simply needs to get there first before turning its attention toward late October.

One thing the experts overlooked in July and another they couldn't foresee explain why an Angels AL West title still is within grasp:

He started June 27 when he shipped shaky reliever Ernesto Frieri to Pittsburgh, which later demoted him to Triple-A Indianapolis and off its 40-man roster. Dipoto landed Jason Grilli, who struggled at times with the Pirates but has flourished with the Angels.

That especially became the case when Dipoto added closer Huston Street from the Padres, allowing Grilli and Joe Smith to work the seventh and eighth innings of games and get them to Street.

As Angels fans took to the Twitterverse to shred Dipoto for standing pat July 31, Register Angels reporter Jeff Fletcher tweeted a spot-on call: "If the #Angels had gotten Huston Street and Jason Grilli today, would it have been a good day?"

"We didn't sit on the sidelines and not take part," Dipoto said. "We made our moves earlier in the month and even in late June."

Street has 10 saves in 11 opportunities since his arrival, and the second-half Angels don't need their starting pitching to dominate late into games.

Their bullpen takes care of that.

- The A's might have pitching, but they haven't had much offense.

These are not the Bash Brothers Athletics, but they support their pitchers and lead the league with 4.83 runs per game. Their offense, however, disappeared at the trade deadline.

In the 19 games since, they averaged a mediocre 3.84 runs, which would put them 14th of 15 American League teams for the season. But 28 of those runs came in three games, leaving them with an average of only 2.81 – a full run below the AL's lowest average – in the remaining 16.

And Oakland is 8-11 in August.

So if the Athletics don't pull themselves together soon, Richards' absence might not hurt the Angels too much until the playoffs.

After all, he likely had seven starts remaining in the regular season, and only one of them would have been against Oakland; he was scheduled to miss the A's this weekend but face them next week at Angel Stadium.

Advanced analytics show Richards' wins above replacement (WAR) at 4.4, but that's not for the remainder of the season. That's for the entire season. Break that down to the 23 percent of the season that remains, and the numbers say it's a one-win difference.

Perhaps that's all the Athletics need, but this isn't as big a blow to the regular season as it seemed when Richards was writhing in anguish at Fenway Park.

The first reaction here upon realizing Richards was the injured Angel? That's their season.

But even as good as he has been, he only is a piece of the Angels' turnaround that has them atop the standings.

The rest of the pieces – plus an arm added from the minors or, less likely, a trade for a player who clears waivers (the return of Bartolo Colon?) – could be enough to pull away during this seven-game stretch from an A's team that looks more pedestrian by the day.

After that, the Angels can worry about advancing in the playoffs.

For now, before someone writes off the Angels one more time, it's about these seven games that can help them win the AL West. That's their season.

West boils down to A's vs. Angels

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON – The schedule, as Angels manager Mike Scioscia is fond of saying, keeps coming.

It doesn't stop for slumps or fatigue or injuries – not even to a team's best pitcher. And as the Angels are just trying to get over the loss of Garrett Richards, the schedule unsympathetically brings them this:

Seven games in 10 days against the Oakland Athletics.

This stretch of schedule, which begins Friday night in Oakland, looked significant months ago. Now, though, it looms even larger.

The Angels, who trailed by as many as four games this month, have caught and passed the A's, heading into the series with a 2-game lead.

While the Angels see an opportunity to get some more distance over the struggling A's, Oakland no doubt sees a chance to regain the lead over the Richards-less Angels.

"It's going to be fun," Mike Trout said. "It's always fun playing those guys there. They are always battling. When you are playing for a playoff push, it's going to be even more fun. The environment is always good."

The three games this weekend in Oakland figure to have an electric atmosphere. O.co Coliseum – as it's currently called – may not have state-of-the-art plumbing or be the most aesthetically pleasing, but it can rock.

"When the A's are good, and they have been very good the last few years, it's a blast," Angels general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "It's a really fun environment. The fans are a little kooky. The players play so loose and carefree it makes for a let-it-hang-out type of environment. If you go in and are loose when you go in, it's a lot of fun to be part of that or even watch it. ...

"And I expect our environment to be a little turbocharged when they come to our place."

Next week, the A's will come to Angel Stadium for a four-game series, starting Thursday.

While fans in both ballparks are certain to crank up the intensity to postseason-like levels, the players will be doing the best they can to stay under control. These seven games – and the other three the Angels will play in Oakland in September – count the same as the other remaining 25 games.

“You try to treat it like (any other game),” said Hector Santiago, who starts Friday for the Angels, “but we know it’s probably one of the biggest series of the year. ... When you toe the rubber and the crowd gets going, it’s going to be loud. It’s going to be something else.”

Santiago and C.J. Wilson, a pair of lefties, will pitch for the Angels in the first two games of this weekend’s series, with Jered Weaver pitching Sunday.

Next weekend in Anaheim, the Angels are scheduled to start Wilson, Weaver, lefty Wade LeBlanc and righty Matt Shoemaker. That makes four lefties pitching against the A’s in seven games, which could represent one of the Angels’ best hopes for taking control of the two series.

The A’s, who have lost eight of their last 10 to surrender the lead, have been in something of an offensive tailspin since trading right-handed slugger Yoenis Cespedes on July 31.

The A’s are hitting .226 with a .651 OPS in August. Against lefties, they have a .624 OPS this month.

Of course, the A’s didn’t trade Cespedes for nothing. They got ace Jon Lester from the Boston Red Sox, giving Oakland a rotation of Lester, Jeff Samardzjia, Sonny Gray, Scott Kazmir and Jason Hammel.

The A’s, in a nod to the significance of this weekend’s series, skipped the struggling Hammel, starting Gray, Lester and Kazmir.

“We are going to go in and see three legit No. 1 guys,” Dipoto said.

The Angels, meanwhile, lost their No. 1 guy when Richards went down for the season. They will need to rely on Weaver as their lead dog. Weaver, who brings a career 2.53 ERA vs. Oakland into the series, said he welcomes the challenge.

“I love competing,” he said. “It’s been a little while since we had this kind of competitiveness, going into a playoff race. It’s always fun to be a part of.”

Shoemaker is 'sensational' as Angels sweep Red Sox

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON – Matt Shoemaker gave up one hit in a performance that Manager Mike Scioscia summed up with one word.

“Sensational.”

In the Angels’ first game after learning that ace Garrett Richards would be out for the rest of the season, Shoemaker did his best to pick up the slack in a 2-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night.

Shoemaker took a no-hitter into the seventh and ended up striking out nine in 7²/₃ innings. It was a performance the Angels needed, not only to feel better about their rotation without Richards, but to rest a weary bullpen.

"It's really uplifting," Scioscia said. "It's important. There's going to be a lot of attention on our rotation, with Garrett not being part of it till the end of the year. ... You can't say enough about what Matty did tonight."

Shoemaker hit the first batter of the game, then he retired the next 20 before Will Middlebrooks' two-out double down the left-field line in the seventh. Shoemaker said he hung a splitter over the middle.

"Definitely it was an unfortunate pitch, given the circumstances," he said.

He came back to finish the seventh and strike out the first two batters of the eighth. He then walked a batter and got pulled, ending his finest performance so far in the majors.

Shoemaker, who didn't make the Angels rotation in spring training, picked up his 12th victory of the season, most by an Angels rookie since Ervin Santana in 2005.

"He's getting an opportunity," Scioscia said. "He's not going to light it up at 95 mph. He knows how to pitch. To get that opportunity, you have to keep knocking at that door. Matty is finally getting that opportunity and he's making the most of it."

BECKHAM ACQUIRED

The Angels acquired infielder Gordon Beckham, once one of the top young players in the majors, to add depth to their bench for the stretch run.

The Angels claimed Beckham on waivers from the Chicago White Sox, who Thursday agreed to trade him for a player to be named or cash. Beckham is expected to join the Angels on Saturday in Oakland.

Beckham, who turns 28 next month, was hitting .221 with seven homers and 36 RBI for the White Sox. He has not lived up to the promise he showed when he hit .270 with 14 homers as a rookie in 2009.

Angels general manager Jerry Dipoto said Beckham will come off the bench, filling in against left-handed pitchers. Beckham has hit .309 against lefties this season. He can play second and third, and Dipoto said the Angels will even see how he looks at shortstop.

Dipoto said Beckham would not jeopardize John McDonald's role on the team.

NOTES

The Angels completed their first four-game sweep of the Red Sox at Fenway Park since 1962. ...

Albert Pujols was ejected for the first time 2005. Pujols was called out on strikes in the sixth inning, and plate ump Andy Fletcher tossed him a few minutes later, from the dugout. Scioscia also was ejected when he came out to defend Pujols. ...

Cam Bedrosian was recalled from Triple-A to take the roster spot of outfielder Brennan Boesch, who was optioned after Wednesday's game. The Angels needed the extra arm because the bullpen has been

working so much lately. They are likely to go back to a 12-man pitching staff Saturday, when Beckham is added to the roster. ...

Pujols was listed among the players who are tentatively scheduled to play on an All-Star team that will tour Japan in November. Scioscia said he had no problem with the 34-year-old making the trip.

Angels' Richards to miss 6-9 months with torn patellar tendon

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON – As the Angels prepared to play a game at Fenway Park on Thursday night, the expected, crushing news came from the other side of the country.

Garrett Richards, who had been their best pitcher as they built the best record in the majors, is going to be out for the rest of this season, and possibly into next season.

An MRI exam and the evaluation of two Angels doctors in Southern California determined that Richards suffered a torn patellar tendon in his left knee in Wednesday's game. He will have surgery Friday and be out for six to nine months.

It was no surprise to the Angels, who expected Richards to be out for the year after they saw him writhing in pain on the field a night earlier.

Now, they have to find a way to cope with the loss.

"We lost one of our best pitchers; there's a reality to that," closer Huston Street said. "But I don't think anybody is going to sit and cry, which Garrett wouldn't want us to."

Mike Trout, one of Richards' closest friends on the team, was among the players who stopped by Richards hotel room late Wednesday night to console him before his cross-country trip to get the diagnosis.

"It's a little bump in the road we're going to have to overcome," Trout said. "Some guys coming up need to step up for us. We need to do what we can with the guys we've got. We've got a great team. We're just going to pull for each other."

As the Angels searched for good news, it's that they are expecting Richards back for most, if not all, of 2015.

Even though the worst-case scenario for Richards' rehab would carry it into May 2015, General Manager Jerry Dipoto said he's assuming Richards will be back by April.

"We don't think it's going to affect 2015, at present time," Dipoto said. "We'll take it day by day."

In the short term, the Angels must find a way to get through the final five-plus weeks of the season without Richards. The Angels, who lead the AL West by 2 games after Thursday night's win in Boston, are still comfortably in position to win at least a wild-card spot.

"You're going to be thinking of Garrett Richards every fifth day as far as how it affects you on the field," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "You might not be able to replace that, but it doesn't mean we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

Left-hander Wade LeBlanc, 30, was recalled from Triple-A on Thursday. LeBlanc, who will be available out of the bullpen for a couple days and then start in Richards' spot Monday, is a veteran of parts of seven major league seasons. He has a career 20-32 record with a 4.56 ERA.

This season, LeBlanc is 10-3 with a 4.00 ERA in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League. He's 5-1 with a 2.89 ERA over his last nine starts.

"Guys in the organization are very pleased with the way he's throwing the ball," Scioscia said. "He's got a chance to come up here and shut a team down by mixing and matching and changing speeds."

If LeBlanc falters, the Angels also have veterans Randy Wolf and Chris Volstad pitching in Triple-A. The Angels also have a deep bullpen that could get even deeper once rosters expand in September, one way to try to compensate for their weaknesses in the rotation.

"Hopefully what we're missing in Garrett Richards we're able to somewhat make up for in volume and depth," Dipoto said.

The Angels could also try to trade for a pitcher, although that's much less likely at this time of year. Pitchers must go through waivers to be traded in August, and the only pitchers who clear waivers are generally those who have expensive contracts or who have performed poorly.

"For all intents and purposes, picking up household names, top-of-the-rotation type guys, that's not going to happen in August," Dipoto said. "It probably won't happen in August most years. We're realistic about what may be out there."

What's not out there is another Richards.

"It's a big loss," Street said, "but it's something we have to adjust to and adapt to. Immediately."

Angels Afterthoughts: Pujols tossed

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON -- Albert Pujols was surprised to be ejected for the first time since 2005.

Pujols, who was called out on strikes in the sixth inning, said he told plate ump Andy Fletcher that a call was "terrible." But Fletcher didn't eject Pujols until a few minutes later, when he was apparently still grumbling from the dugout.

"I let my emotions go, saying that pitch was terrible," Pujols said. "That was it. But he's a good umpire. I like that whole crew."

Manager Mike Scioscia, who got ejected when he came out to defend Pujols, said he thought Fletcher should not have tossed Pujols because he was already back in the dugout.

"He threw Albert out from 80 feet away when Albert wasn't on the top step, wasn't on the field," Scioscia said. "I just thought it was inappropriate."

TWEET TWEET

Matt Shoemaker's wife, Danielle, tweeted: "Middlebrooks you butthole" right after Boston's Will Middlebrooks broke up the no-hit bid in the seventh inning.

Told of it later, Shoemaker smiled: "That's 'cute funny' right?"

The tweet was later deleted.

ALSO...

Jason Grilli got his first save with the Angels. Closer Huston Street was given a day off after pitching five of the previous six games. Grilli worked a perfect ninth...

As impressive as Shoemaker's outing was, it should be noted that the Red Sox played without David Ortiz (day off) and Mike Napoli (back spasms). Yoenis Cespedes started and left after one at-bat because of a personal matter...

On a day the Angels acquired infielder Gordon Beckham and said that he would fill in at second, third and even short, second baseman Howie Kendrick and shortstop Erick Aybar each had three hits...

The Angels are 76-50, which is one game worse than their best 126-record in franchise history. They were 77-49 in 2008...

Mike Trout was caught stealing second for the first time all year, and it was on an impressive throw from Boston catcher Christian Vazquez. "That was a rocket," Scioscia said. Trout had been picked off earlier in the series, which also counted as a caught stealing.

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 A's swept the Angels in their last visit to Oakland, one of only two series all season in which the Angels have been swept.

Athletics update: The A's have lost eight of their last 10 games, including a five-game losing streak, to blow a four-game lead over the Angels. They scored just 11 runs in the losing streak. The streak was entirely on the road, though. The A's have a league-best 41-22 record at home.

THE PITCHERS

LHP HECTOR SANTIAGO (3-7, 3.46)

With Garrett Richards out, Santiago actually has the lowest ERA of any of the remaining starters, which is ironic because he was considered the No. 6 starter for much of the season. Since his brief trip to Triple-A, Santiago has a 2.59 ERA. Manager Mike Scioscia has been reluctant to stretch him past about 95 pitches, but he may need to do that as the staff thins and the bullpen works harder.

- **Vs. Athletics:** 1-2, 2.53
- **At O.co Coliseum:** 0-2, 18.00
- **Loves to face:** Josh Donaldson, 1 for 8 (.125)
- **Hates to face:** Josh Reddick, 3 for 7 (.429)

RHP SONNY GRAY (12-7, 2.99)

The 24-year-old has been as good as advertised in his first full season, after making his first splash in the majors last year. Gray has lost four consecutive starts, although in two of them he was the victim of poor support from the A's offense. Gray has a 4.94 ERA in August. The Angels scored three runs in 62/3 innings against Gray when they faced him in Oakland on June 1.

- **Vs. Angels:** 1-0, 2.45
- **At O.co Coliseum:** 10-5, 2.83
- **Loves to face:** Kole Calhoun, 1 for 6 (.167)
- **Hates to face:** Howie Kendrick, 3 for 7 (.429)

UPCOMING MATCHUPS

Saturday: Athletics LHP Jon Lester (13-8, 2.58) vs. Angels LHP C.J. Wilson (10-8, 4.59), 6 p.m.

Sunday: Athletics LHP Scott Kazmir (14-5, 2.73) vs. Angels RHP Jered Weaver (13-7, 3.70), 5 p.m.

Angels to recall Wade LeBlanc, Cam Bedrosian

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON -- The Angels are beginning Life Without Garrett Richards on Thursday, with lefty Wade LeBlanc and righty Cam Bedrosian expected to join the recently overworked pitching staff.

LeBlanc, a 30-year-old who has pitched parts of seven big league seasons, is expected to be available in the bullpen for the next few days, and then start in place of Richards on Monday against the Miami Marlins.

Bedrosian, 22, joins a bullpen that has been forced to handle a heavy workload because of short outings by the starters lately.

None of them were shorter than the 1 2/3 innings Richards before suffering a devastating knee injury that is expected to knock him out for the season. Richards returned to Southern California for further tests and examination on Thursday.

The Angels are expected to announce results sometime before the 4 p.m. PT start of Thursday's game against the Boston Red Sox.

In the short term, it looks like LeBlanc will go into his rotation spot.

LeBlanc owns a 20-32 record and a 4.56 ERA in the majors. He has pitched only 7 1/3 innings in the majors this season -- 6 1/3 with the Angels and one with the Yankees -- but he's posted an impressive 4.00 ERA with the Angels' Triple-A affiliate in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League. LeBlanc is 5-1 with a 2.89 ERA over his last nine games with Salt Lake City. He last pitched on Sunday, so he'll be available if the bullpen needs a long man in the next couple of days.

Bedrosian has a 7.59 ERA in 10 games over several stints in the majors this season. He has a 1.30 ERA in the minors, pitching at three levels. He was recently sent down for his first Triple-A assignment, and he gave up two earned runs in 3 2/3 innings in four games with Salt Lake City.

The moves give the Angels nine relievers available for Thursday's game. They removed a position player when outfielder Brennan Boesch was sent down to Triple-A after Wednesday's game. The Angels are expected to bring back a position player -- likely C.J. Cron -- by Saturday's game in Oakland.

Final: Angels 2, Red Sox 0

By Jeff Fletcher

BOSTON -- Matt Shoemaker certainly did his part to pick up for the loss of Garrett Richards.

In the Angels' first game after learning that their ace would be out for the rest of the season, Shoemaker took a no-hitter into the seventh inning of a 2-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night.

Shoemaker gave up one hit in 7 2/3 innings, striking out nine. He picked up his 12th victory of the season, most by an Angels rookie since Ervin Santana in 2005.

The Angels completed their first four-game sweep of the Red Sox at Fenway Park since 1962.

Winners of eight of their last nine games, the Angels pushed their division lead to two games as they head west for a showdown series with the second-place Oakland Athletics starting Friday.

Shoemaker gave the Angels a much needed performance. They had only gotten seven innings from a starter once in the previous 13 games. In four of the previous five games, the starter hadn't made it through the sixth. And on Wednesday night, Richards got hurt after recording just five outs.

Shoemaker hit the first batter of the game, then he retired the next 20 before Will Middlebrooks' two-out double down the left-field line in the seventh.

Mike Morin got the final out of the eighth and Jason Grilli pitched the ninth for his first save with the Angels. Huston Street had pitched four of the previous five days.

The Angels scored on Josh Hamilton's double in the first and Mike Trout's single in the seventh.

Albert Pujols was ejected for arguing after he was called out on strikes in the sixth. It was Pujols first ejection since 2005. Manager Mike Scioscia was then ejected.

FROM ANGELS.COM

Shoemaker flirts with no-no in win over Red Sox

By Alden Gonzalez

BOSTON -- One night after the Angels wondered how they could ever recover from the loss of Garrett Richards, the following question came to the forefront:

Where on earth would they be without Matt Shoemaker?

The undrafted 27-year-old rookie no-hit the Red Sox through 6 2/3 innings and one-hit them through 7 2/3 on Thursday night, leading the Angels to a 2-0 victory hours after they learned that their best starting pitcher, Richards, would require season-ending surgery to repair a torn left patellar tendon.

"This is what I've been talking about," catcher Chris Iannetta said. "We need guys to step up, from the first guy to the 25th guy to another 10 guys who are going to get called up in September. It's going to take all of us to get this done."

And so far most of them have. Thanks to Shoemaker's gem, the Angels completed their first four-game sweep at Fenway Park since 1962 and won for the eighth time in their last nine games, moving a season-best 26 games above .500 and two full games ahead of the idle division-rival A's for the best record in the Majors.

At 76-50 they're just one game off their best pace through 126 games, set by the 100-win team of 2008.

"We have a great team," said Albert Pujols, who was ejected in the sixth for arguing balls and strikes.

Shoemaker struck out three times as many batters (nine) as he allowed baserunners (three), continuing his standout season one night after Richards' knee buckled while he was sprinting toward first base.

Manager Mike Scioscia, ejected as well after defending Pujols, called Shoemaker's outing "uplifting."

"It's important," Scioscia added. "There's going to be a lot of attention on our rotation with Garrett not being part of it. Anything our guys do will be important.

"You can't say enough about what Matty did tonight."

Shoemaker plunked the first batter of the game, Brock Holt, then retired the next 20 in a row -- seven on strikeouts, eight on routine groundouts, five on harmless flyouts. The splitter had a little more bite than usual, the location was as precise as ever, and all of a sudden, the bearded right-hander was seven outs from becoming the first rookie to throw a no-hitter in Fenway since Clay Buchholz in 2007.

"I didn't even really know or even think about it until the fifth or sixth," Shoemaker said. "It's like one of those things you don't even know or think about until it's like, 'OK, who's coming up?' And you realize where you're at in the order and go, 'Man, all right. Let's just make pitches.' Take that out of my head and just go pitch."

The next batter was third baseman Will Middlebrooks, who was only in the game because Yoenis Cespedes left to attend to a personal matter. Shoemaker fell behind, 2-1, then got Middlebrooks to swing through a slider to even the count. Shoemaker's next pitch, his trademark splitter, started high and didn't drop far enough.

"Definitely just an unfortunate pitch, given the circumstances," Shoemaker said.

Middlebrooks drove it down the left-field line, giving the Red Sox (56-71) just their second baserunner of the night, and the no-hitter was over.

"His split was good tonight," Middlebrooks said. "It looked like his fastball out of his hands, so I was up there looking [for an] off-speed [pitch]."

Middlebrooks didn't miss it, but he also didn't score. Shoemaker retired the next batter, then the next two in the eighth before walking Mookie Betts and exiting with a season-high 116 pitches.

Shoemaker went undrafted out of Eastern Michigan University in 2008, became a professional pitcher only because the Angels offered him \$10,000 after his redshirt-junior season, and was mired in Triple-A each of the last two seasons. Now he has 12 wins -- tying the Yankees' Masahiro Tanaka for the Major League lead among rookies -- and a 3.56 ERA for the best team in baseball.

"He goes out there with his stuff, and he thinks his stuff will get hitters out," Scioscia said. "And he really has the confidence that it is. With that composure he has, and that poise, it gives him a sense of confidence where he's not going to be intimidated. He's not afraid to fail. He trusts what he can do, and he's having a terrific season for us."

Richards out for season with torn knee tendon

By Alden Gonzalez

BOSTON -- The Angels' biggest fear on Wednesday night became their reality on Thursday afternoon: Garrett Richards has a torn left patellar tendon, an injury that will require surgery, scheduled for Friday - a procedure that comes with a six- to nine-month recovery.

Now the first-place Angels must officially move on without their best starting pitcher.

"You're going to be thinking of Garrett once every fifth day when he was out there," manager Mike Scioscia said. "You might not be able to replace that, but it doesn't mean that we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

Richards' season-ending injury -- and, thus, a season-defining moment for his team -- happened on an innocuous play the 26-year-old right-hander has executed countless times.

Brock Holt's grounder was hit to the right side. Albert Pujols fielded it, spun and fired to second. Richards sprinted to first, hoping to complete an inning-ending 3-6-1 double play, but instead he buckled to the ground, clutching the knee.

He was taken off the field on a stretcher nearly 10 minutes later.

Richards was examined by the Angels' medical staff, then taken to Massachusetts General Hospital before quickly being discharged. He flew to Los Angeles early Thursday morning and underwent an MRI at about noon PT.

General manager Jerry Dipoto said that nine months is an absolute worst-case scenario, adding that the injury "should not affect" Richards' 2015 season.

But the Angels -- who had a 1 1/2-game cushion on the best record in the Majors when play began on Thursday -- will be without their most dominant starter for the most critical junctures of the season, be it a division race or a Wild Card game or a Game 7.

Richards finishes his season with a 13-4 record, a 2.61 ERA and 164 strikeouts in 168 2/3 innings, numbers that put him in the mix for the American League Cy Young Award.

"We're going to take it one game at a time," center fielder Mike Trout said. "We can't get ahead of ourselves. It's tough losing Garrett, for sure. But we just have to keep winning ballgames. That's all that matters."

Dipoto, who traded for White Sox infielder Gordon Beckham on Thursday, said the Angels are "open" to acquiring starting pitching through the August waiver period, but cautioned that it's a difficult proposition. An American League player would have to pass through 14 teams and a National League player would have to pass through 29 before the Angels even had a chance to negotiate a trade.

"Between now and Sept. 1, we'll try to be as open as we can be," Dipoto said of acquiring rotation help. "And after Sept. 1, hopefully what we're missing in Garrett Richards we're able to somewhat make up for in volume and depth."

For now the Angels will use Wade LeBlanc, the 30-year-old left-hander who was called up from Triple-A Salt Lake on Thursday. LeBlanc will give the Angels length out of the bullpen the next couple of games and start on Monday -- what would have been Richards' next turn -- if he isn't needed in an extreme circumstance.

LeBlanc, 10-3 with a 4.00 ERA in 21 starts in the Pacific Coast League, will join a rotation that includes Jered Weaver, C.J. Wilson, Matt Shoemaker and Hector Santiago -- the remains of a staff that also lost 23-year-old Tyler Skaggs to Tommy John surgery.

"We don't want to put any more pressure on these guys than what they already have," pitching coach Mike Butcher said. "Just go out there and make pitches, be efficient, get as deep as you can into games."

There's some concern because Richards' surgery will be on his landing leg, which, because he is a right-hander, undergoes more stress. But, as Butcher said, "You're also driving off your right leg. Neither leg is good. Either way you look at it, it's not good."

All of the Angels' starters huddled around Richards as he lay on the ground on Wednesday, with Pujols on one knee and holding his hand. Throughout the game, several of them went through the clubhouse to pat him on the back, often finding him in tears while he was propped up in the trainer's room.

After the game they cycled through Richards' hotel room. At that point, Butcher said, Richards had "calmed down," "wasn't beating himself up" and "got focused on what's going on." Butcher visited with Scioscia, bullpen coach Steve Soliz, and trainers Adam Nevala and Rick Smith.

Also present was veteran reliever Jason Grilli, who tore his right patellar tendon during Spring Training in 2010, missed the entire season, then signed with the Pirates the following winter and watched his career take off.

Grilli's advice: "It's terrible, it hurts, and it's fixable."

"He's got a lot of work ahead of him," Grilli added, "but it's a fixable thing. His career is not over."

"He's a very talented pitcher, and he's got a very promising career. He'll be back out, maybe even better. I can't wait. Sometimes when things like that happen, you find the inner you."

Angels, A's set to battle for first place in AL West

By Manny Randhawa

The last time the A's and Angels met, on June 11, Oakland won, 7-1, and left Anaheim with a 3 1/2-game lead over Los Angeles in the American League West.

The A's were riding high for much of the season, but things have changed for them since that game. Oakland has lost eight of its last 10 games. In that span, Los Angeles has been hot, and the A's have gone from first place in the division to second.

Following their own loss and two Angels wins in the last two days, the A's have fallen two games behind in the standings.

"We've just gone through a tough stretch here, and really, the first one of the year," said A's manager Bob Melvin. "I never thought it looked like we were running away with it. I don't buy into that at all, these percentages you see up there to win the division and all that. It can be swung very quickly in three games. They're one of the best teams in baseball, and we know we're going to have some seriously emotional games against them."

The rivals will clash in a three-game series beginning on Friday at O.co Coliseum, with each remaining meeting between the clubs crucial to how the postseason picture will take shape.

But for Angels outfielder Kole Calhoun, the standings are not the only things that have changed.

"I think we're kind of a different team now than what we were then," Calhoun said. "It's going to be huge, man. It's going to be a dogfight. Two good teams going at it. They have a good pitching staff over there. They play good baseball, find a way to win games all the time. It's going to be fun. It's going to definitely be a battle."

As the A's have gone recently, so has their starter for the opener, right-hander Sonny Gray. After going 6-0 with a 2.11 ERA in seven starts prior to August, he is 0-4 with a 4.94 ERA in four starts this month.

Despite his recent struggles, however, he has an excellent track record against AL West opponents this season. In nine starts against division foes, he is 8-1 with a 2.00 ERA. He has also had success against the Halos, going 1-0 with a 2.45 ERA in three appearances (two starts) against them.

The Angels will counter with left-hander Hector Santiago, who has been pitching very well as of late. Over his last seven outings (five starts and two relief appearances in extra innings), he has a 1.39 ERA. He has also been fantastic in two starts against the A's this season, yielding one earned run in 13 innings against them.

Santiago is putting less pressure on himself now after beginning the season 0-6 with a 5.19 ERA.

"Especially with me [starting] one day and going to the bullpen, and going back and forth, like, 'This is my last start.' Whatever it is, five, six, seven innings, I just try to take that game as the last game of the year," Santiago said. "I just worry about today, and that's all that matters."

Angels: Calhoun continues to provide spark

Calhoun has been crucial to the Angels' success this season and has been providing a spark both offensively and defensively.

Over his previous 12 games, he was batting .391, with six doubles, two homers and 11 RBIs. He also led the Majors with a .514 slugging percentage as a leadoff hitter.

In Tuesday night's win over the Red Sox, Calhoun made a spectacular leaping grab at the wall in right field to rob Brock Holt of a three-run homer.

"I just kind of took a peek [at the wall]," said the 5-foot-10 Calhoun. "The ball was up there for a while, so I had time to get back. I knew I was close. I actually didn't think I was going to hit the wall. I thought I was going to come in kind of short, but I came down right on it and made the catch."

A's: Rotation shuffled for Angels series

The A's will skip Jason Hammel's next scheduled start, which would have come on Friday. With off-days on Monday and Thursday this week, Melvin decided to put the struggling Hammel -- 1-5 with a 6.75 ERA

since being acquired in a trade with the Cubs -- in the bullpen on days when he isn't throwing on the side.

Hammel is expected to make his next start during the next series, in Houston.

"With these off-days, we've manipulated a little bit here," Melvin said. "But we still know that [Hammel is] very important to us, and we have to get him going."

Worth noting

- The A's have won six of nine games against the Angels in 2014. Including Friday's series opener in Oakland, the two teams will meet 10 more times this season.
- Mike Trout is 10-for-26 with five doubles, two homers and seven RBIs in his last six games against Oakland.

Angels add infield depth with Beckham

By Alden Gonzalez

BOSTON -- The Angels acquired infielder Gordon Beckham from the White Sox for a player to be named or cash considerations on Thursday.

The right-handed-hitting Beckham, expected to join the team in Oakland on Saturday, is expected to fill in at second base, third base and potentially shortstop, occasionally spelling the infielders while also serving as a platoon option at designated hitter.

Beckham has batted only .221/.263/.336 this season but has posted an .803 OPS against lefties (compared with .530 against righties).

"Not having a great year with the bat, but really wearing out left-handed pitching," said general manager Jerry Dipoto, who put a claim on Beckham before working out a trade. "We feel like it's a real nice platoon advantage for us."

The Angels finish the season with 43 games in 45 days, with their only off-days coming on Sept. 1 and 25. Beckham's presence will allow manager Mike Scioscia to give second baseman Howie Kendrick, third baseman David Freese and shortstop Erick Aybar a day off when needed, while keeping utility infielder John McDonald in his role as a late-game defensive replacement.

Beckham, 27, is controllable through 2015 and is making \$4.175 million this season, with the Angels picking up the prorated portion of that.

The No. 8 overall pick in the 2008 First-Year Player Draft, Beckham -- a natural shortstop who has mostly played corner infield in the Majors -- has a career .244/.306/.374 slash line through six years in the big leagues. He showed promise in his first season, batting .270 with 14 homers and 63 RBIs to finish fifth in American League Rookie of the Year voting, but he struggled offensively over the next five years.

The Angels are hoping to maximize Beckham's abilities in a part-time role.

"I think the benefit with our team is that you don't need him to take four at-bats a game, seven days a week," Dipoto said. "You just need him to be a part of the team."

Angels turning to LeBlanc with Richards out

By Alden Gonzalez

BOSTON -- In a way, Garrett Richards and Wade LeBlanc are tied together.

It was LeBlanc who saved the bullpen in Oakland on May 29, providing 6 1/3 innings of four-run ball immediately after Richards gave up five runs in the bottom of the first.

Now LeBlanc will get the first crack at Richards' suddenly vacant rotation spot.

The 30-year-old lefty was called up from Triple-A Salt Lake on Thursday to potentially provide some length out of the bullpen over the next couple of games and to start on Monday against the Marlins. LeBlanc went 10-3 with a 4.00 ERA and a 3.14 strikeout-to-walk ratio in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League.

"Guys in the organization are very pleased with the way he's throwing the ball," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's got a chance to come up here and shut a team down by mixing and matching and changing speeds."

LeBlanc accumulated 424 1/3 innings in the big leagues from 2008 to 2014, going 20-32 with a 4.56 ERA. After he appeared in that May 29 game at O.co Coliseum, the Angels -- in need of fresh arms for a tired bullpen -- designated him for assignment and watched him get claimed by the Yankees.

LeBlanc made one appearance for New York, then was put on waivers again, cleared, rejected his outright assignment and re-signed with the Angels on June 17.

"We were very fortunate that after he left the Yankees, he came back to us," general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "He has feel, he has an out-pitch changeup, he has a breaking ball he can throw for strikes. He's pitched in this league many times; he's started games over and over.

"Between Wade and Randy Wolf and Chris Volstad, we felt like, if nothing else, we have a volume of Major League experience. If this moment came, we had someone who was competent, who can go out there and start at the Major League level."

Worth noting

- In addition to LeBlanc, the Angels recalled right-handed reliever Cam Bedrosian from Triple-A Salt Lake on Thursday. Bedrosian, 22, has a 1.30 ERA with 16.6 strikeouts per nine innings in 39 appearances in the Minors and a 7.59 ERA in 10 appearances in the Majors.
- Asked if he had any concerns about Albert Pujols, 34, taking part in the five-game exhibition All-Star Series in Japan in November, Scioscia said, "I have no reservations [when it comes to] what guys do after the season. If he wants to go, fine."

Like '02 club, Angels can ride bats through October

By Lyle Spencer

Predictably, the doomsayers are forecasting doom and the naysayers are saying nay. When Garrett Richards, in the midst of a brilliant season, went down in agonizing pain near first base at Fenway Park on Wednesday night, the first reaction was that the Angels' World Series championship visions collapsed with him.

On Thursday, an MRI confirmed that Richards will require surgery for a torn patella tendon in his left knee, and recovery time is six to nine months.

You don't win it all, conventional wisdom goes, without dominant starting pitching. That's why teams are willing to pay high prices to land the likes of Jon Lester, David Price and John Lackey in late July.

"The Angels aren't going to the World Series without this guy [Richards], I'll tell you that," Christopher Russo assured viewers on MLB Network on Thursday.

But here's the thing about perception and reality: they don't always intersect. You *can* win a title without rolling out a rotation full of aces. If the Halos and their fans need historical precedent to lift their spirits in the wake of Richards' fall, a DVD of the 2002 postseason will suffice.

It will show an Angels team rolling through the Yankees, Twins and Giants, winning 11 of 16 games on the way to the club's first World Series crown. Manager Mike Scioscia's club did it on the strength of a lethal offense, a sound defense and a deep, talented bullpen. The starting pitching was, to put it kindly, mediocre.

The Halos came into the playoffs with a rotation no more impressive than what they will have if they hold together and make it to October. Jarrod Washburn, Ramon Ortiz, Kevin Appier, Aaron Sele and Lackey, a rookie with 18 career starts, were Scioscia's options in 2002.

Washburn and Ortiz were the workhorses, and the wear and tear showed in the playoffs. Over the course of those 16 games, Angels starters averaged five innings per outing and were roughed up for a 5.38 collective ERA.

Washburn (9.31 ERA), Appier (11.37) and Ortiz (7.20) were pounded by the Giants in the World Series. Only the kid, Game 7 starter and winner Lackey (3.60), managed to keep Barry Bonds and Co. at bay.

"We didn't really have a No. 1-type guy in the playoffs," said second baseman Adam Kennedy, a .340 postseason hitter with a memorable three-homer eruption in decisive Game 5 of the 2002 American League Championship Series against the Twins. "But we had a great bullpen, and our offense was hitting on all cylinders. We were a confident bunch."

The Halos' offense had a .320/.367/.512 slash line in that postseason. Darin Erstad, Garret Anderson, Tim Salmon, Troy Glaus, David Eckstein, Scott Spiezio, Brad Fullmer and Bengie Molina joined Kennedy in the wrecking crew.

Francisco Rodriguez came out of nowhere to win five of the 11 games in overpowering relief, alongside feared closer Troy Percival. A collection of tough-minded middle relievers was superbly maneuvered by Scioscia and pitching coach Bud Black.

Twelve years later, the Angels have a rock-solid bullpen, proven big-game starters in Jered Weaver and C.J. Wilson, the latter the ace of the ill-fated 2011 Rangers team that fell one out shy of a World Series title against the Cardinals.

Like the 2002 Halos, the '11 World Series championship St. Louis team won with offense in manager Tony La Russa's swan song. La Russa had a deep, resourceful bullpen and spotty starting pitching. The starters were 5-5 with a 4.60 ERA in the postseason, averaging 5.1 innings per start, while the relievers were 6-2 with a 3.31 ERA.

As you watched the Angels respond Wednesday night to the stunning image of Richards writhing and screaming on the ground, you couldn't help thinking about the 2002 band of characters that simply refused to cave in.

Going back to work after Richard was carried off on a stretcher, the Halos beat the Red Sox to reach .600 (75-50), the best record in the Majors. A much-needed jolt came from slumbering Josh Hamilton, who looked like himself (single, double, three RBIs) with bullets to all fields after a pregame session with hitting coach Don Baylor, the sage.

If Hamilton has indeed regained his confidence and stroke in support of Mike Trout, Albert Pujols, Kole Calhoun and Co., these Angels have the offensive tools to drive their way deep in October. Hamilton's left-handed presence between Pujols and Howie Kendrick is essential.

While there is only one Trout, the game's best player, those 2002 Halos had a deep and formidable lineup featuring Anderson, Glaus and Salmon in the middle and Eckstein, Erstad and Kennedy setting the table.

Calhoun, one of the stories of this season, has the toughness and competitive spirit of those 2002 table-setters. Lineup chemistry starts at the top, and it doesn't get any better in the Majors right now than Calhoun and Trout.

Most managers and general managers are reluctant to embrace clubhouse chemistry as a significant factor, but players talk about it all the time. All season, Richards and his roommate, Trout, have been especially vocal about the exceptional chemistry on this team.

There's a fine blend here of veterans who have been through the fire -- Pujols, David Freese, Hamilton, Wilson, Weaver, Kendrick, Erick Aybar, Kevin Jepsen -- and young guys, led by Trout and Calhoun, burning to experience October.

Huston Street and Joe Smith would love to show they can replicate the magic of Percival and K-Rod at the back end of the bullpen 12 years later.

A big series with the Athletics in Oakland awaits the Angels this weekend. As this is written, the Halos are 25 games over .500. After 125 games in 2002, on Aug. 21, the Angels were 75-50 on their way to a Wild Card ride for the ages.

Déjà vu, anyone?

MLB stars commit to 'All-Star Series' in Japan

By Paul Casella

For some of Major League Baseball's best players, the games won't end in October this year.

All-Stars Robinson Cano, Adam Jones, Albert Pujols and Yasiel Puig will highlight a group of Major Leaguers, led by Rangers manager Ron Washington, who will travel to Japan in November to take part in a five-game All-Star Series against Japan's national team, Samurai Japan. The rest of the Major League All-Star roster will be announced at a later date.

The "All-Star Series 2014" marks the 11th such All-Star Series, though it's the first since 2006. It will be the 36th time overall, dating back to 1908, that a team of big leaguers has traveled to Japan for exhibition games.

The five-game format that will be used this fall was first introduced during that last All-Star Series in 2006, which was swept by a Major League team that included All-Stars such as Bronson Arroyo, Ryan Howard, John Lackey, Joe Mauer, Joe Nathan, Jose Reyes, David Wright and Chase Utley.

The All-Star Series will feature three games in Tokyo (Nov. 14-16), bookended by one game each in Osaka (Nov. 12) and Sapporo (Nov. 18). In addition to the five-game All-Star Series, the Major League team will also participate in a pair of exhibition games -- one on Nov. 11 against the Hanshin Tigers and Yomiuri Giants in Koshien and the other on Nov. 20 versus Team Japan in Okinawa.

Pujols, Scioscia ejected after arguing strike

By Alden Gonzalez

BOSTON -- First baseman Albert Pujols and manager Mike Scioscia were both ejected in the sixth inning of Thursday's game at Fenway Park for arguing balls and strikes with home-plate umpire Andy Fletcher.

Pujols was upset over a strike call on a 2-1 slider that appeared to be up and in, which preceded a strikeout, and voiced his opinion to Fletcher in the batter's box. But he wasn't thrown out until later, while standing near the bat rack.

Pujols said he "didn't say anything to him back from the dugout."

As he went to grab some water, he was informed by Mike Trout that he had been ejected for the sixth time in his career and the first since 2005.

"Andy's a great guy," Pujols said after the Angels' 2-0 win. "I let my emotions go, saying that pitch was terrible. That was it. But he's a good umpire. I like that whole crew. They're fun to be around. When you're on base, they talk to you, they ask about your family. He told Mike that I showed him up. I don't know how I showed him up."

Scioscia was ejected -- for the second time this season -- after a heated discussion in which he defended Pujols, leaving bench coach Dino Ebel to manage the rest of the game.

Scioscia feels Fletcher's response to Pujols was "inappropriate."

"Obviously, he was targeting Albert, no doubt about it," Scioscia said. "That's not the way you handle a situation like that."

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Angels' Richards out for season with knee injury

By AP Sports

BOSTON (AP) -- The Los Angeles Angels are going to be without Garrett Richards for a playoff run.

One of the AL West leader's top starters sustained a serious knee injury, tearing his left patellar tendon Wednesday against the Boston Red Sox

Richards was 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA this year. It's a serious blow to the Angels, who also lost starter Tyler Skaggs to Tommy John surgery earlier this season.

"You're going to be thinking of Garrett once every fifth day when he was out there," manager Mike Scioscia said Thursday. "You might not be able to replace that, but it doesn't mean that we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

General manager Jerry Dipoto said "we'll be open" about finding a deal to replace Richards in the rotation.

Richards crumbled to the ground covering first base on a potential 3-6-1 doubles play against Boston. He was taken off the field on a stretcher and was flown to Los Angeles on Thursday morning, where he had an MRI.

The Angels tweeted Richards will have surgery on Friday. The rehabilitation time should be six to nine months.

The Angels selected the contract of left-hander Wade LeBlanc, who pitched briefly for the New York Yankees earlier this season, from Triple-A Salt Lake. Richards was placed on the 60-day DL to make room on the 40-man roster.

Angels-Athletics Preview

By Jordan Garretson

Mike Trout may be slumping, but the Los Angeles Angels are rolling.

Given Trout's recent history at Oakland Coliseum, he could catch fire too Friday night as the Angels look to extend their advantage in the AL West when they open a three-game series with the Athletics.

The Angels (76-50) own a two-game edge over Oakland (74-52) and have won eight of nine after their first four-game sweep in Boston since 1962. Los Angeles' pitchers own a 2.70 ERA over the last nine games and Matt Shoemaker held the Red Sox hitless for 6 2-3 of his 7 2-3 innings in Thursday's 2-0 victory.

Though Trout's 89 RBIs rank third in the majors, he's 5 for 36 in that 8-1 stretch and 9 for 57 (.158) over his last 14 games with 20 strikeouts.

However, he's batting .357 over his last 10 games in Oakland with six home runs and 16 RBIs and homered in his lone game there this year.

These clubs haven't met since the Angels took two of three in Anaheim from June 9-11. Oakland totaled one run in each of its losses after tallying 26 runs in a three-game home sweep from May 30-June 1.

The Athletics (74-52) have lost eight of 10 with their starters posting a 5.08 ERA. All but one of those losses came on the road, though, so a return home should prove favorable. Oakland is a major league-best 35-14 at home since May 7.

Sonny Gray (12-7, 2.99 ERA) has lost four straight starts with a 4.94 ERA. Previously he had only lost consecutive starts once through his first 31 career outings.

Gray gave up four runs and eight hits in 5 1-3 innings of a 4-3 road loss to Atlanta on Saturday. It marked the second time in three outings he failed to complete at least six innings after doing so in 20 of his previous 22 games.

He beat the Angels in a 6-3 home victory on June 1, allowing three runs in 6 2-3 innings. He didn't factor into the decision in his only other start against Los Angeles, yielding a run over six innings in a 2-1 victory on Sept. 17.

Trout is 1 for 4 versus Gray, though the lone hit was a home run.

Los Angeles will counter with Hector Santiago (3-7, 3.46). The left-hander is undefeated over his last 11 appearances - eight starts - with a 2.45 ERA, though he also has just three victories in that span. The Angels have lost his last three outings, but have supplied him with just five runs of support over 17 1-3 innings.

He yielded a run and four hits over six innings of Los Angeles' 3-2 defeat at Texas on Sunday. Santiago was in line for the victory before Huston Street's blown save.

"There's no doubt about his ability to throw strikes and I think he's commanding counts better," manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's been keeping guys off-balance. He's been pitching good baseball."

Santiago is 1-0 in three starts versus Oakland, allowing two earned runs over 19 1-3 innings. He didn't receive a decision in either matchup this year while yielding eight hits in 13 innings

Josh Donaldson is 3 for 20 over his last six games and 1 for 8 versus Santiago.

Howie Kendrick, who went 5 for 9 over the last two games against Boston, is 3 for 7 against Gray. He has also hit safely in 14 of his last 15 games at Oakland with nine RBIs.

Angels complete sweep with 2-0 win at Boston

By Doug Alden

BOSTON (AP) -- Hours after a devastating blow to the Los Angeles rotation, the Angels were reassured and relieved by rookie starter Matt Shoemaker.

Shoemaker threw 6 2-3 inning of no-hit ball and the Angels held on for a 2-0 victory against the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night, completing a four-game sweep and taking a two-game lead in the AL West.

"I didn't even really know or think about it until about the fifth or sixth," Shoemaker said. "It was just one of those things - work and focus on pitches, who's coming up and then you realize where they are in the order."

The only hit Shoemaker (12-4) allowed was a double to Will Middlebrooks with two outs in the seventh. It was the only hit Boston got all night and welcome timing for the Angels, whose bullpen was weary with a cross-country flight ahead and huge series opening at Oakland on Friday.

The Angels were also dealing with confirmation that Garrett Richards (13-4) is out for the season with a knee injury that occurred Wednesday while covering first on a potential double play.

"I think it's really uplifting. I think it's important. There's going to be a lot of attention on our rotation obviously with Garrett not going to be part of it," manager Mike Scioscia said. "You can't say enough about what Matty did tonight."

Shoemaker struck out nine before a two-out walk to Mookie Betts in the eighth ended his night. It was the only walk for Shoemaker, who struck out nine. Jason Grilli pitched the ninth for his 12th save of the season and first with the Angels since coming to Los Angeles in a deal with Pittsburgh on June 27.

The Angels have won four straight and eight of nine, taking a two-game lead over the A's into this weekend's series at Oakland.

Josh Hamilton hit an RBI double in the first and Kole Calhoun hit a sacrifice fly in the seventh for Los Angeles' only other run. It was all the offense the Angels needed.

Shoemaker said he was thinking about Richards (13-5) as he warmed up Thursday.

"Up until gametime, it was really heavy on my mind. During the game, I was trying to focus on pitching which I think was good thing because that's what G does," he said. "It's a detrimental loss to us but we're all going to fight hard to pick him up and we're just going to keep getting stronger from it."

Rubby De La Rosa (4-5) pitched 6 2-3 innings, allowing two runs eight hits and getting himself out of a couple of jams as he tied his career high with eight strikeouts. Boston was able to cut off potential rallies for the Angels in the first and seventh, holding them to run in each and staying within reach throughout Shoemaker's no-hit bid.

"We couldn't get anything going against him. He's been very consistent for them," Boston manager John Farrell said.

CRUISING

After hitting Boston leadoff batter Brock Holt, Shoemaker retired 20 straight before facing Middlebrooks with two outs in the seventh.

Shoemaker is the first Angels rookie with 12 wins since Ervin Santana went 12-8 in 2005.

EARLY NIGHT

Angels 1B Albert Pujols was thrown out in the sixth after striking out and getting all the way back to the dugout. Scioscia said he hadn't heard Pujols say anything worthy of getting tossed and went to the plate to argue with umpire Andy Fletcher, who tossed the Los Angeles manager, too.

TRAINING ROOM

Angels: The Angels announced after the game that Richards will have surgery on Friday. The Angels selected the contract of left-hander Wade LeBlanc, from Triple-A Salt Lake and placed Richards on the 60-day DL to make room on the 40-man roster.

Red Sox: LF Yoenis Cespedes left the game after three innings for an undisclosed personal reason, the Red Sox said. Manager John Farrell said after the game that it was a family emergency, but could not elaborate. Boston activated Allen Craig (sprained left foot) from the 15-day disabled list and started him at 1B Thursday night.

UP NEXT

Angels: LHP Hector Santiago (3-7, 3.46 ERA) gets the start in the AL West showdown as the Angels open a weekend series at second-place Oakland.

Red Sox: RHP Joe Kelly (0-1, 5.2 9) tries again in his second start at Fenway Park as a member of the Red Sox when they open a weekend series against Seattle. Kelly was tagged for seven run on seven hits in four innings Sunday in a loss to the Houston Astros.

FROM ESPN.COM

Shoemaker ices Sox on first trip to Fenway

By Gordon Edes

BOSTON -- Here's one way to make your first trip to Fenway Park memorable:

- Have a bucket of ice water poured on your head from the top of the Green Monster;
- Take a no-hitter into the seventh inning;
- Have your wife tweet what she thought was a "little joke" about the guy who broke up your no-no, then have to delete it because of all the grief she took.

This summed up the past two days for Angels rookie Matt Shoemaker, who on Wednesday created his own way to honor Pete Frates and the ALS ice bucket challenge, then iced the Red Sox Thursday night until Will Middlebrooks doubled with two outs in the seventh inning, Boston's only hit in a 2-0 loss to Los Angeles.

"We were smart about it," Shoemaker said of the dousing he took from teammate Efen Navarro and one of the clubhouse attendants Wednesday afternoon. "We took all the ice out.

"Some of our guys have had ice dumped from three feet and gotten cut in the head. I'm not going to be

stupid about it. We took the ice out. It was awesome. I didn't know about Pete Frates until we got here. For him, a big Boston fan, doing it here, that was awesome."

So was setting down 20 straight Red Sox batters, after hitting leadoff man Brock Holt, in a bid to become the first rookie to throw a no-hitter since Boston's Clay Buchholz on Sept. 1, 2007, and the first opposing pitcher to throw a no-no at Fenway since Detroit's Jim Bunning in 1958.

Shoemaker was still at Eastern Michigan University in 2007, then went undrafted in 2008 as 1,504 players were taken without his name being called. He signed with the Angels after the draft for \$10,000, and has turned into one of the game's best bargains: His 12 wins are tied with Masahiro Tanaka for most in the majors by a rookie in 2014.

Danielle Shoemaker evidently was disappointed when Middlebrooks broke up the no-no by lining a double into the left-field corner.

"Middlebrooks you butthole," she tweeted, only to delete it later due to negative reaction.

"I'm getting a lot of rude responses for a little joke," she subsequently tweeted.

Shoemaker smiled when told of his wife's Middlebrooks tweet.

"Is that good or bad?" he said. "That's a funny way to do it, right?"

"I'm glad she said it the way she said it. I know her better than other people. That's her just being funny, goofy. That's cool."

Richards tough to replace for Angels

By ESPN Stats & Information

Los Angeles Angels pitcher Garrett Richards is expected to miss 6-9 months after an MRI exam Thursday revealed a torn patellar tendon in his left knee. He sustained the injury while running to cover first base in Wednesday's start against the Boston Red Sox.

With Richards done for the year, let's review his breakout season and his importance to the Angels.

Breakout season

Richards entered the season 9-9 with a 4.37 ERA in 29 career starts (167 innings), but the 26-year-old figured things out this year. Richards will finish the year 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA over 168 2/3 innings. In 1 2/3 more innings this year, he gave up 32 fewer runs as a starter than the previous three years.

He has become one of the best starters in the American League, ranking first in opponent slugging percentage (.261), second in opponent batting average (.201), eighth in ERA (.261), 10th in strikeout rate (24.2 percent) and sixth in ground-ball rate (51.3 percent).

Richards' opponent slugging percentage is the fourth lowest in a season in Angels history and the lowest since Nolan Ryan in 1977. It's also the third lowest by any pitcher in the last 20 seasons. The only two lower? Pedro Martinez (.259) in 2000 and Greg Maddux (.258) in 1995, both of whom went on to win Cy

Young awards those years.

So just how did Richards put it together this season? His plus stuff finally started missing bats. From 2011 to '13, Richards' strikeout rate was only 15.2 percent as a starter. That ranked 168th out of 230 pitchers who started at least 20 games over that span. This season, he has increased his strikeout rate to 24.2 percent, which ranks 16th out of 95 qualified starters. In fact, only one starter in baseball has increased his strikeout rate more than Richards from last season to this season (Brandon McCarthy 8.0 percentage points; Richards 7.9).

Importance to Angels

The Angels are 19-7 (.731) when Richards starts this season and 57-43 (.570) when anyone else does. According to Elias, the Angels' .731 win percentage with Richards on the mound is the best for any starter in the American League this season (minimum 15 starts).

Angels Starting Pitchers This Season

	Richards	All Others
Team W-L	19-7	57-43
ERA	2.61	3.99
Opp BA	.201	.247
WHIP	1.04	1.26

Richards has been worth 4.4 Wins Above Replacement this season. Entering Thursday, all other Angels starters had been worth 3.3 WAR combined. The loss of Richards could have an effect on the Angels' bullpen as well. No bullpen has thrown more innings since the All-Star break than the Angels (122).

Replacing Richards

While it's unclear who will take Richards' spot in the rotation the rest of the season, the Angels will surely look for their other starters to step up, as Matt Shoemaker did Thursday night against the Red Sox.

Shoemaker no-hit the Red Sox through 6 2/3 innings and finished with 7 2/3 scoreless innings along with nine strikeouts. Since giving up a career-high eight runs against the Kansas City Royals on June 27, Shoemaker is 5-2 with a 2.51 ERA in seven starts.

Angels need Santiago more than ever

By Kenton Wong

With injuries in the past few weeks to young starters Garrett Richards and Tyler Skaggs, the Los Angeles Angels rotation quickly became an area of need. Aside from replacing Richards' spot in the rotation (early signs look like Wade LeBlanc is the choice), the Angels need the other four starters to step up

their game.

Hector Santiago This Season

	1st 7 Games	Since
W-L	0-6	3-1
ERA	5.19	2.48
Opp BA	.272	.194
HR	6	3

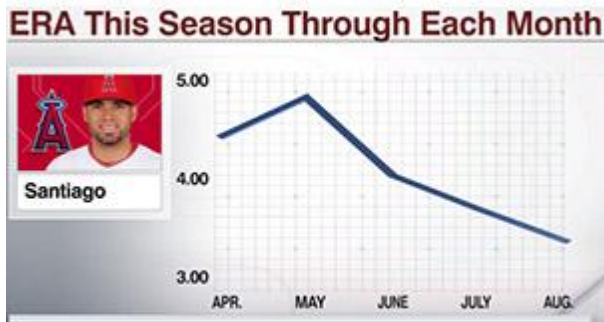
One starter who has quietly lowered his ERA over the summer is Hector Santiago. He'll get the ball as the Angels open up their weekend series against the Oakland Athletics.

Santiago came over in the offseason as part of the Mark Trumbo trade that also netted Skaggs.

The lefty put up a solid 3.41 ERA from 2011-13 with the Chicago White Sox. But there were warning signs as his Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP) over that span was 4.49, suggesting he was more lucky than good.

Bad first impression

Those fears turned to reality quickly this season as the Angels lost Santiago's first seven starts of the season, with the southpaw tagged for six of those losses and a 5.19 ERA.



ESPN Stats & Information

Santiago spent most of May and June bouncing between the bullpen and the rotation. Since the initial demotion, his ERA has been less than half than it was in his first seven games.

Lately a stellar fastball-changeup combination has worked for Santiago. In his last 15 games Santiago has held opponents to a .161 BA in at-bats ending with a fastball and a .179 in at-bats ending with a changeup.

Getting straight A's

The Athletics have had plenty of trouble trying to hit Santiago this year. He has made two starts against them this year, both in Anaheim, allowing a total of one run and eight hits in 13 innings. That run came on a solo shot by Yoenis Cespedes who is no longer on the team.

Third baseman Josh Donaldson has really struggled against Santiago, striking out three times in six at-bats this season.

FROM FOX SPORTS WEST

Angels expect Richards to return in '15, pitch 'without any trepidation'

By Abbey Mastracco

BOSTON — The news hit the clubhouse shortly before the team took the Fenway Park field for batting practice on Thursday.

An MRI revealed a torn left patellar tendon in Los Angeles Angels right-hander Garrett Richards. The Angels will be without his services for the next 6-9 months and he's set to have surgery on Friday.

It was far from good news, but it was finally some news and something resolute.

The questions were finally answered.

"I think the unknown was weighing on him a little bit," said manager Mike Scioscia. "I think Garrett has a lot of confidence now where he is. Whatever the time frame is with his rehab, he's going to throw his first couple bullpens and he's going to get out there and pitch without any trepidation." Already down one on the pitching staff after lefty Tyler Skaggs' Tommy John Surgery a week ago, the team with the best record in baseball is now without their top pitcher. Richards was 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA; finding someone comparable on waivers isn't likely.

"The resources that we have to deal from, the caliber of player is going to be directly correlated with the caliber of player we would be bringing in," general manager Jerry DiPoto said. "Picking up household names, front-of-the-rotation guys, all stars — that's not going to happen in August."

The Halos called up Wade LeBlanc from Triple-A Salt Lake City and he's expected to take Richards' place in the rotation. LeBlanc, a 30-year-old veteran, is 10-3 with a 4.00 ERA in 123 2/3 innings in the Pacific Coast League this season.

In three of his last four starts, he allowed just one run in each of those outings, while going 3-1 during the stretch.

"He's looked great, he's pitched really well and we've gotten great reports," Scioscia said. "Not only statistically, but from a scouting perspective, guys in our organization are very pleased with the way he's been throwing the ball and he's got a chance to come up here and shut a team down."

Freak accidents are tough to watch to begin with, but they're more difficult when it appears so severe and threatening to an important young player.

Even Boston's David Ortiz remained on the field watching the training staff with the third-year starter offering words of encouragement to both him and his teammates.

"I saw the whole thing, I saw Albert (Pujols) throw to (Erick) Aybar and I was kind of anticipating a throw to Erick so I peeked over to see where he was at and I saw him kind of tumble over," said right fielder Kole Calhoun. "I saw him go down and I knew it was bad when he laid there for that extra second."

As Richards writhed in pain and Pujols motioned to the Red Sox dugout for a trainer, the severity of the injury hit his teammates.

"The worst part is that you could hear him in pain," Calhoun said. "That's completely uncomfortable. You never want to see a friend like that go down."

Mike Trout visited Richards' hotel room Wednesday night and said he was as positive as he could be given the circumstances, but he was anxious, nonetheless.

"He was a little bit more relieved when I got to the hotel with him. He kind of calmed down when I talked to him a little bit," Trout said. "It's going to be tough without him but we've still got to play baseball."

Everyone's collective minds are on the health of Richards, who has a tentative surgery date for next week in Orange County. His teammates expect he'll return to his old form, but the Angels' pitching staff will survive while he's out of action.

"It doesn't mean that we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff," Scioscia said. "I'm just very confident that he's going to pitch for us next year with the effects that it could have been with maybe some other knee things."

Angels hope change of scenery benefits newly-acquired INF Beckham

By Abbey Mastracco

BOSTON — The Los Angeles Angels acquired infielder Gordon Beckham from the Chicago White Sox on Thursday afternoon.

While it's not starting pitching, general manager Jerry DiPoto says it's a key move nonetheless. Beckham, 27, was claimed off waivers by the Angels in exchange for cash or a player to be named later. In 101 games this season as a platoon hitter, Beckham has hit .221 with a .263 on-base percentage. He came into the league as a third baseman, but he' also played second and shortstop.

It's his versatility and his ability to hit against left-handed pitching that DiPoto says will help the Halos the most down the stretch.

"He's not having a great year with the bat but he's really wearing out left-handed hitters," DiPoto said Thursday from the Fenway Park dugout. "I feel like it's a real platoon advantage for us. We'll be playing, I think, 37 of the next 39 days and it gives us an opportunity for us to give Howie (Kendrick) a day, give David Freese a day and potentially give Erick Aybar a day. It also gives us a right-hander to use in the DH role against left-handed pitching."

Beckham was drafted in 2008 out of the University of Georgia and debuted for the White Sox less than one year later. Once a star on the rise, Beckham has struggled with the bat since his breakout rookie season. Last year, he hit .267 in 103 games but still spent time down in the minors, as he did this season as well.

"Sometimes guys need a change of scenery," DiPoto said. "Gordon's first year in Chicago, he was fantastic. He played third base primarily and got off to a start that suggested that he would be a major star. He was a top-10 pick in the draft, but after that first year he was moved to second base and has never been as impactful offensively and he's always had platoon splits."

But the splits were exactly what DiPoto was looking for.

"We don't need him to take four at-bats a day, seven days a week," DiPoto said. "We just need him to be a part of our complete team and over the course of the week get some good at bats against lefties."

Beckham's splits are similar to those of current Angels infielder Grant Green, who was earning at-bats as a utility man, playing several positions until going down with a lumbar strain. Green is expected to begin his rehab assignment Friday at triple-A Salt Lake. It's unclear what they will do with Green, but DiPoto says Beckham figures to be used in more of a DH role.

Should the change of scenery help Beckham over the next month, the depth in the Angels' lineup could be powerful enough to carry them through October.

FROM USA TODAY

Nightengale: Angels can stay afloat, if money men respond

By Bob Nightengale

The Los Angeles Angels, sickened by the sound of teammate Garrett Richards screaming in agony a night earlier, felt queasy themselves Thursday, hearing the news they feared.

Richards, who emerged as their ace in his brilliant season, is out for the year.

Richards suffered a torn patellar tendon of the left knee, requiring surgery that will sideline him for six to nine months.

The Angels might not see him again on the mound until next summer.

"To have something like that happen," Angels veteran starter Jered Weaver says, "is obviously a crushing blow to any team."

The Angels, who have the best record in baseball, realize nobody is going to feel sorry for them. They might be hurting, but they can't go on bereavement leave.

Richards, 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA might be done, but the American League West race will go on.

It's baseball.

"You're never going to replace what a guy like Garrett has done with one pitcher," says Angels manager Mike Scioscia, cognizant of Richards' 1.95 ERA since June 4, including an opposing batting average of .195. "But as a group, I think we can do what we need to get done in the absence of Garrett.

"We're playing with confidence now, and I don't think there's anybody in that clubhouse that doesn't feel that we're going to move toward our goal, even with the setback of not having Garrett."

While everyone suddenly is worried about who will fill the void, with the Angels summoning veteran Wade LeBlanc on Thursday, the reality is the reinforcements already are in place.

They have enough to still win the AL West, or seal a wild-card berth, ending their four-year playoff drought.

No, we're not talking about journeymen such as LeBlanc, Randy Wolf or Chris Volstad, who will be called upon to absorb the remaining seven starts Richards would have made down the stretch.

We're talking about the \$442.5 million in dudes they grabbed during the 2011 and 2012 offseasons.

Yes, you remember the trifecta: first baseman Albert Pujols, outfielder Josh Hamilton and starting pitcher C.J. Wilson.

Pujols, with 23 homers and 77 RBI, now is living up to his end of the deal and resembling the man who tormented the National League for the St. Louis Cardinals.

It's up to Hamilton and Wilson to finally do the same.

The Angels' season depends on them.

Hamilton, who signed a five-year, \$125 million contract, has been lost since returning from his torn thumb ligament in June. He's hitting .249 with six homers and 32 RBI since his return, including 92 strikeouts in 289 plate appearances.

And he has yet to hit a home run at Angel Stadium this season.

It has to change. And quickly. The Angels have 10 games remaining against the Oakland Athletics -- with seven before Labor Day -- starting this weekend in Oakland.

Hamilton, who asked for a mental day of rest earlier this week and then got another for good measure, responded Wednesday night with his best game in a month. He drove in three runs with a double and two sacrifice flies. His three RBI equaled his combined total in the previous 73 plate appearances.

Thursday, Hamilton drove in the Angels' first run with an RBI double. So perhaps his miseries are near an end.

Yet Scioscia continues to show confidence in him, keeping him in the cleanup spot. Hitting coach Don Baylor insists Hamilton will bounce out of the funk, convinced he has too much talent. And Angels owner Arte Moreno has no choice but to believe in him, since he's the one signing his paychecks.

If the Angels are going to hang on and win the AL West, they simply can't survive without Hamilton at least resembling the player who tore up the division when he was with the Texas Rangers. They might not have the dominant pitching without Richards, but if Hamilton recovers, they'll sure have the offense.

Wilson, who becomes the No. 2 starter behind Weaver, is just as vital to their October hopes.

He's having one of the worst seasons of his career since he became a full-time starter, going 10-8 with a 4.59 ERA. He endured a recent six-game stretch in which he yielded a 11.03 ERA, giving up 43 hits and 14 walks in 23 2/3 innings. Not once did he last longer than five innings.

Wilson, in the third year of a five-year, \$77.5 million contract, has shown improvement in his last two starts, winning both, and giving up three earned runs in 12 innings.

It's a start.

The Angels need more innings from him. They need more dominant performances. They can't rely on youngsters Hector Santiago and Matt Shoemaker continuing their magic with Tyler Skaggs out for the season after undergoing Tommy John elbow surgery this month.

Sure, it would have been easier if Richards' injury had happened before the July 31 non-waiver trade deadline. Now, with every contender in baseball knowing the Angels are desperate for a starter, fat chance anyone will let a starter slip through to the Angels.

The Angels, who have acquired four relievers in the last seven weeks, have no choice but to pull through it themselves.

After all, the A's didn't pause to bemoan the loss of starters A.J. Griffin and Jarrod Parker before the start of the season.

It didn't stop the St. Louis Cardinals from winning the 2011 World Series without an inning from Adam Wainwright; they're currently in playoff position, 1 1/2 games out of first in the National League Central while playing without All-Star catcher Yadier Molina and No. 2 starter Michael Wacha.

"It reminded me of 2011 when we lost Wainwright," said Angels third baseman David Freese, who was on that team with Pujols. "And that year ended up pretty good."

Certainly, it hasn't stopped the Detroit Tigers, who have gone through four starting shortstops this season, lost three of their setup men to season-ending injuries and have two ailing starters in Justin Verlander and Anibal Sanchez.

The Baltimore Orioles lost catcher Matt Wieters for the season after 26 games, and All-Star third baseman Manny Machado has made 82 starts, but their nine-game lead in the AL East is the largest in baseball.

Now, it's the Angels' turn to step into the ring with adversity.

Sure, they had won 19 of Richards' 26 starts this year, but he'd already thrown a career-high 168 2/3 innings. There's no guarantee fatigue wouldn't have interrupted his roll at some point.

"Yeah, it's tough," Freese says. "Tough on him, tough on us. He's a big piece of our team.

"But we'll pull through."

It's up to Hamilton and Wilson to lead the way.

FROM SI.COM

Garrett Richards' injury is huge blow to Angels in tight AL West battle

By Jay Jaffe

Garrett Richards' breakout season has been one of the key reasons why the Angels own the best record in baseball, but on Wednesday night, the 26-year-old righty suffered a serious left knee injury and was carted off the field at Fenway Park on a stretcher. The injury will require season-ending surgery in a loss that will further deplete a rotation that recently lost Tyler Skaggs to Tommy John surgery and could carry major ramifications for the AL playoff race.

Richards was scuffling in the second inning of Wednesday's start against the Red Sox when he went to cover first base on a potential double play grounder off the bat of Brock Holt. First baseman Albert Pujols fielded the ball and threw to shortstop Erick Aybar for the force at second. Aybar pumped but did not throw to first, because Richards had crumpled to the ground en route; instead he threw to third base in an attempt to catch Xander Bogaerts, who had rounded the bag aggressively and had to scramble back to safety. Meanwhile, the pitcher screamed and writhed on the ground in obvious pain for several minutes before being loaded onto a stretcher. The video is here, and it's not a comfortable sight.

The Angels wound up coming from behind to win the game 8-3, widening their newfound AL West lead to 1 1/2 games over the slumping Athletics, but that was of little consolation compared to the early prognosis on Richards, who headed back to Los Angeles for a 12 PM PT examination by team doctors. In the absence of a definitive diagnosis, manager Mike Scioscia termed it a "significant injury," but via MLB.com's Alden Gonzalez, teammate Jered Weaver hinted at its severity and specificity, telling reporters, "When the doctor came in and told him he might have done something to his patella tendon and surgery might be involved, he kind of lost it." Surgery to repair the patellar tendon generally takes around six months of recovery, meaning that in all likelihood, Richards is done until spring training.

UPDATE: Thursday's MRI revealed that Richards does, in fact, have a torn patellar tendon in his left knee. He'll undergo surgery next week and will miss anywhere from six to nine months, putting him out for the rest of the season and possibly the start of 2015 as well.

The injury is a major blow to the Angels, not to mention the pitcher himself. A 2009 supplemental first-round pick out of the University of Oklahoma, Richards spent 2011-13 shutting in and out of the Angels' rotation, starting in 29 of his 84 appearances, showing promise but putting up a gaudy 4.42 ERA. A

combination of improved velocity — more than 1.5 mph added to both his four-seamer (average velocity 97.2 mph) and sinker (96.9 mph), a gain all the more impressive given his move to longer stints as a full-time starter — and increased reliance on his sinker and curve have led to a significant spike in his strikeout rate, from 16.3 percent of all batters faced (6.3 per nine) to 24.2 percent (8.8 per nine).

Through 26 starts and 168 2/3 innings, Richards has been stellar, carving out spots in the AL's top-10 in homers per nine (0.3, first), FIP (2.61, fourth), Wins Above Replacement (4.4, sixth), quality-start rate (73 percent, tied for sixth), ERA (2.61, eighth), ERA+ (141, eighth) and strikeouts per nine (10th). That performance earned him a spot in the AL All-Star Final Vote; he lost to Chris Sale, and somehow managed to avoid being named as a replacement, placing him among this year's most notable snubs.

Even so, Richards has emerged as the Angels' best starter, claiming the staff ace mantle from Weaver. Among Angels starters, Hector Santiago is the only one with an ERA (3.46) that's less than a run higher than Richards', and Santiago has thrown just 96 1/3 innings while shuttling back and forth between rotation and bullpen. Weaver has sputtered en route to a 3.70 ERA (100 ERA+) and 4.24 FIP, which itself is miles ahead of the performance of C.J. Wilson (4.59 ERA and 4.34 FIP via a beefy 4.1 BB/9). Skaggs started off strong but saw his ERA rise to 4.30 before going on the disabled list on Aug. 1 and undergoing Tommy John surgery nine days later. Twenty-seven-year-old rookie righty Matt Shoemaker has been a pleasant surprise filling in for other injured pitchers, delivering a 3.84 ERA in 14 starts and seven relief appearances totaling 96 innings.

Shoemaker is now a rotation staple instead of a safety net, which means that the Angels will have to turn elsewhere to fill in for Richards. The rotation at Triple-A Salt Lake includes lefties Wade LeBlanc and Randy Wolf as well as righty Chris Volstad, all of whom have significant major league experience, though the 37-year-old Wolf's 5.26 ERA (4.38 FIP) in 25 2/3 innings for the Marlins represents the largest sample size this year. The 29-year-old LeBlanc is pitching well in the high-offense environment, posting a 4.00 ERA and 8.4 strikeouts per nine, but he's been tagged for a 5.63 ERA (5.10 FIP) in 62 1/3 major league innings in the past two seasons for the Marlins, Astros, Yankees and Angels. In his lone appearance for Los Angeles, he yielded four runs in 6 1/3 innings of relief on May 30 after Richards was chased amid a first-inning barrage. The team's Double-A Arkansas rotation includes 24-year-old lefty Michael Roth, who has put up a 2.76 ERA there despite striking out just 4.8 per nine; he's been tagged for a 6.75 ERA in 26 2/3 major league innings over the past two seasons.

The late date means that adding a starter from outside the organization requires a delicate dance on the waiver wire. The Angels' 75-50 record puts them last in the pecking order among AL teams, meaning that everyone including division rivals Seattle (68-58) and Oakland (74-52), not to mention the pitching-poor Yankees (63-61) and suddenly banged-up Tigers (68-56), can put in a waiver claim that could potentially block a deal. Most options who get through waivers unclaimed — allowing them to be dealt anywhere before midnight on Aug. 31 — aren't likely to be a whole lot better than the aforementioned replacement-level caliber alternatives within the organization, as the likes of recent Dodgers acquisitions Kevin Correia and Roberto Hernandez attest.

That said, the Mets offer two intriguing possibilities. Twenty-seven-year-old lefty Jon Niese is among those known to have cleared waivers. The 27-year-old lefty has pitched respectably (3.50 ERA, 3.96 FIP) and is affordable, owed only around \$18 million through 2015-16, including the buyout of his \$11 million 2017 option. Meanwhile, 41-year-old righty Bartolo Colon, who won the 2005 AL Cy Young award for the Angels before tearing his rotator cuff in the playoffs and embarking upon a half-decade long odyssey, has yet to be placed on waivers. Colon has pitched to a 3.85 ERA and 3.40 FIP thanks to the league's lowest walk rate (1.2 per nine) and second-best strikeout-to-walk ratio (6.0). He's owed around another \$2 million for this year plus \$11 million for next year, which makes claiming him potentially hazardous to

some teams' payrolls. Given how much success he enjoyed in Oakland in 2012-13, it's easy to imagine the pitching-rich A's claiming him, but first he'd have to clear waivers in the NL, where the suddenly depleted Dodgers would certainly snap him up if given the chance.

You can expect general manager Jerry Dipoto to be increasingly aggressive in putting in waiver claims between now and the deadline — and perhaps even afterward, even though players acquired in September are ineligible for the postseason roster. Losing Richards isn't likely to cost the surging Angels a playoff spot; their current 7-1 run has given them a 6 1/2-game cushion as far as the worst-case scenario second wild-card spot goes. Even so, the injury may well be enough to help the A's regain their lost ground in the division race, thus forcing Scioscia to turn to somebody besides his ace for the do-or-die Wild Card Game. Thus while the season still has nearly one quarter remaining, when it's all said and done, Richards' injury may be second only to that of the Yankees' Masahiro Tanaka when it comes to reshaping the postseason picture.

FROM THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Team Report - LOS ANGELES ANGELS

BOSTON -- The Los Angeles Angels are clearly determined to put the season-ending injury sustained by right-hander Garrett Richards behind them and get on with the rest of the regular season.

And beyond.

Rookie Matt Shoemaker, pitching the first game since Richards went down with a torn left patellar tendon that will keep him out at least the rest of this season, flirted with a no-hitter and combined with two relievers on a one-hitter in a 2-0 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Thursday.

"It's a detrimental loss to us, but we're all going to fight hard to pick him up and we're just going to keep getting stronger from it," Shoemaker said after raising his record to 12-4.

He admitted Richards, the 13-game winner who went down Wednesday night, was on his mind.

"Up until game time, it was really heavy on my mind," he said. "During the game, I was trying to focus on pitching, which I think was a good thing because that's what 'G' does."

Said manager Mike Scioscia: "You're going to be thinking of Garrett once every fifth day when he was out there. "You might not be able to replace that, but it doesn't mean that we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

The Angels increased their lead in the AL West to two games over the idle Oakland Athletics. The teams play seven games over the next two weekends, starting with three in Oakland beginning Friday night.

NOTES, QUOTES

RECORD: 76-50

STREAK: Won four

NEXT: Angels (LHP Hector Santiago, 3-7, 3.46 ERA) at Athletics (RHP Sonny Gray, 12-7, 2.99 ERA)

PLAYER NOTES:

--RHP Garrett Richards will need six to nine months of recovery time after undergoing left patellar tendon surgery Friday. An MRI exam in Los Angeles on Thursday confirmed Wednesday night's initial diagnosis after Richards was hurt covering first base on a potential double play. The prognosis puts the start of the 2015 season in doubt for Richards, who finishes 13-4 with a 2.61 ERA. He was placed on the 60-day disabled list. "You're going to be thinking of Garrett once every fifth day when he was out there," manager Mike Scioscia said. "You might not be able to replace that, but it doesn't mean that we're not going to be able to reach our goal as a cumulative pitching staff."

--RHP Matt Shoemaker hit the first batter of Thursday night's game, then retired 20 in a row before Red Sox 3B Will Middlebrooks broke up his no-hit bid with two outs in the seventh. Shoemaker gave up just that one hit in 7 2/3 innings and notched his 12th win, the most by an Angel rookie since Ervin Santana won 12 in 2005. The club record for wins by a rookie is 14, set by Dean Chance, Marcelino Lopez and Frank Tanana. Shoemaker also picked up a win by throwing three no-hit innings against the Red Sox in a 19-inning game at Anaheim on Aug. 9, so he had a string of 9 2/3 hitless frames against Boston snapped by the double. Shoemaker threw a career-high 116 pitches.

--SS Erick Aybar had three hits, a stolen base and a run in Thursday night's win. He was also robbed of an extra-base hit when CF Mookie Betts ran down his drive in left-center. He is hitting .319 in 32 career games in Boston. It was his ninth three-hit game of the season. He hit a double, the 186th of his career, moving him into eighth place on the Angels' all-time list. Jim Fregosi (219) is the only shortstop with more.

--1B Albert Pujols and his manager, Mike Scioscia, were both ejected from the game by plate umpire Andy Fletcher in the top of the sixth inning -- after Pujols was called out on strikes. It was Pujols' second strikeout in three at-bats in the game. He went 5-for-10 in the previous three games during the Boston series.

--DH Josh Hamilton hit an RBI double Thursday, making him 7-for-24 while hitting in safely in six of his past seven games. The hot streak follows a 1-for-24 spell.

--2B Gordon Beckham was acquired by the Angels in a waiver deal from the Chicago White Sox for either a player to be named later or cash. Beckham, a lifetime .244 hitter, hit .221 with seven homers and 36 RBIs in 101 games with the White Sox this season. He will join his new team in Oakland for the weekend series and could be used at second base, shortstop or third base. Beckham is in the second year of arbitration eligibility and is making \$4.18 million this season. He is to become a free agent after the 2015 season.

--LHP Wade LeBlanc, a journeyman who appeared in one game (one inning) for the Yankees earlier this season, had his contract selected from Triple-A Salt Lake. He is in line to start for the Angels on Monday against Miami, one of his former teams. LeBlanc, 20-32 with a 4.56 ERA lifetime, was available for relief work Thursday night in Boston but didn't get into the game.

--LHP Hector Santiago, who hasn't lost since June 15 after dropping his first seven decisions of the year, faces the Athletics when the Angeles open a three-game weekend series in Oakland on Friday night. In his past five starts, Santiago is 1-0 with a 1.63 ERA, allowing 16 hits and striking out 17 in 27 2/3 innings.

--RHP Cam Bedrosian, 0-1 with a 7.59 ERA in 10 relief outings with the Angels earlier this season, was recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake in time for Thursday night's game. In 39 appearances for three teams in the Angels' farm system this year, he went 2-0 with 18 saves and a 1.30 ERA.

--OF Brennan Boesch was optioned to Triple-A Salt Lake when the Angels recalled RHP Cam Bedrosian on Thursday. Boesch hit .129 in 31 at-bats with the Angels.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "One word -- sensational." -- Manager Mike Scioscia, on RHP Matt Shoemaker, who took a no-hitter into the seventh inning Thursday during a 2-0 win over the Boston Red Sox.

ROSTER REPORT

MEDICAL WATCH:

--RHP Garrett Richards (torn left patellar tendon) went on the 60-day disabled list Aug. 21. He will undergo season-ending surgery Aug. 22. He might not be ready for the start of the 2015 season.

--LHP Joe Thatcher (sprained left ankle) went on the 15-day disabled list Aug. 3. He is expected to be out until early to mid-September. He can start some light throwing off a mound in Arizona but is not close to returning, manager Mike Scioscia said Aug. 20.

--LHP Tyler Skaggs (strained flexor tendon in left forearm) went on the 15-day disabled list Aug. 1, and he was transferred to the 60-day DL on Aug. 10. He underwent season-ending Tommy John surgery Aug. 13. He will miss the rest of the 2014 season and all of the 2015 season.

--INF/OF Grant Green (lower back strain) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to July 21. He began baseball activities at the Angels' Arizona complex in early August. As of Aug. 20, he was running and hitting, and he was getting close to starting a rehab assignment.

--LHP Sean Burnett (torn left ulnar collateral ligament) went on the 15-day disabled list May 29, and he was transferred to the 60-day disabled list June 3. He underwent season-ending Tommy John surgery June 5.

--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 in mid-April.

ROTATION:

RHP Jered Weaver

RHP Matt Shoemaker

LHP C.J. Wilson

LHP Hector Santiago

LHP Wade LeBlanc

BULLPEN:

RHP Huston Street (closer)

RHP Joe Smith

RHP Jason Grilli

RHP Kevin Jepsen

RHP Michael Morin

RHP Cory Rasmus

RHP Fernando Salas

RHP Cam Bedrosian

CATCHERS:

Chris Iannetta

Hank Conger

INFIELDERS:

1B Albert Pujols

2B Howie Kendrick

SS Erick Aybar

3B David Freese

INF John McDonald

OUTFIELDERS:

LF Josh Hamilton

CF Mike Trout

RF Kole Calhoun

OF Efrén Navarro

OF Collin Cowgill

Team Report - OAKLAND ATHLETICS

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland A's announced a change in their rotation Tuesday, then didn't start All-Stars Josh Donaldson and Derek Norris on Wednesday.

Both things were done with the upcoming three-game showdown series against the Los Angeles Angels in mind.

Is it any wonder the A's went out and laid an egg in an 8-5 home loss to the New York Mets on Wednesday?

The A's did their best to downplay the upcoming series after Wednesday's game. However, their actions spoke louder than words in one of their uglier performances of the season, especially at home, where they had won 35 of their previous 47 games.

Hired gun Jeff Samardzija struggled through his worst game in an Oakland uniform. Meanwhile, the Oakland offense failed to capitalize on six walks, three Mets errors and a rare subpar performance by New York ace Zack Wheeler.

The A's got into the Mets' depleted bullpen (two relievers were unavailable because of injuries) in the sixth inning, but managed to add only one run -- and it was unearned.

Oakland begins the weekend two games behind Los Angeles in the American League West standings.

NOTES, QUOTES

RECORD: 74-52

STREAK: Lost one

NEXT: Angels (LHP Hector Santiago, 3-7, 3.46 ERA) at A's (RHP Sonny Gray, 12-7, 2.99 ERA)

PLAYER NOTES:

--RHP Sonny Gray brings a career-worst, four-game losing streak into the opener of the Athletics' showdown series with the Los Angeles Angels on Friday night. Just about everything else about the matchup is a positive for the 12-game winner. Gray has gone 10-2 in his career against the American League West, including 1-0 against the Angels. That win came earlier this season, when he allowed three runs in 6 2/3 innings in a 6-3 A's victory. Gray has a 2.45 ERA in three career starts against the Angels.

--RHP Jeff Samardzija was the victim of two-out hits in by far his shortest outing as a member of the A's in Wednesday's 8-5 loss to the New York Mets. Samardzija couldn't get out of the fourth inning, giving up seven runs on seven hits. Six of the hits came with two outs, including a half-swing bloop that landed near third base and yet resulted in a single by RF Curtis Granderson against a shifted Oakland defense. Three batters after what could have been the third out, Mets 1B Lucas Duda belted a three-run homer, turning what might have been a 1-0 game into a 5-0 runaway.

--3B Josh Donaldson did not start the Athletics' 8-5 loss the New York Mets on Wednesday, but he did finish it. In fact, the All-Star had what might have been the most important at-bat of the game, with two outs and the bases loaded in the bottom of the eighth inning and the A's down by three. He hit the ball hard, but right at Mets SS Wilmer Flores, who was able to knock it down and record the game-saving, inning-ending out at first base.

--C Derek Norris can expect a busy few days with the Los Angeles Angels starting left-handers in the first two games of the American League West showdown Friday and Saturday. Norris sat and watched left-handed-hitting John Jaso get the start Wednesday against the New York Mets. But instead of getting the full day off that manager Bob Melvin hoped, Norris had to be pressed into action late in a game the A's were losing. Norris went 0-for-2, once grounding into a double play.

--LHP Eric O'Flaherty is cleared to pitch in consecutive games, A's manager Bob Melvin announced before Wednesday's game against the New York Mets. O'Flaherty, who debuted for the A's on July 3 after undergoing Tommy John surgery on his left elbow, has pitched only 13 1/3 innings in his first 14 appearances, and never two days in a row. O'Flaherty pitched in Tuesday's 6-2 win over the New York Mets, striking out the only hitter he faced, and then was declared available had Melvin needed him Wednesday. As it turns out, LHP Fernando Abad and RHP Dan Otero were able to finish out the 8-5 loss.

QUOTE TO NOTE: "Usually your team gets you five runs, it ends in a victory. A big game today and I didn't do my part. It stings." -- RHP Jeff Samardzija, after the Athletics' 8-5 loss to the New York Mets on Wednesday.

ROSTER REPORT

MEDICAL WATCH:

--C Derek Norris (sore back) was in the lineup Aug. 19 but was only able to run at three-quarters speed. He appeared as a sub Aug. 20, and the A's had an off day Aug. 21. Manager Bob Melvin said he hopes Norris will be back to full speed Aug. 22.

--SS Jed Lowrie (hairline fracture of right index finger) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to Aug. 14.

--1B Kyle Blanks (torn left calf) went on the 15-day disabled list retroactive to June 23. An MRI revealed that Blanks' calf has a small tear and is not merely strained, the initial diagnosis. He ran full speed Aug. 2 and ran the bases Aug. 5 and Aug. 7. He began a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Aug. 9.

--2B Nick Punto (strained right hamstring) went on the 15-day disabled list Aug. 3.

--OF Craig Gentry (broken right hand) went on the 15-day disabled list July 28. He began a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento on Aug. 18. The timetable for his return was uncertain as of Aug. 19.

--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.

--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. He resumed playing catch Aug. 4.

ROTATION:

LHP Jon Lester

RHP Sonny Gray

LHP Scott Kazmir

RHP Jeff Samardzija

RHP Jason Hammel

BULLPEN:

LHP Sean Doolittle (closer)

RHP Dan Otero

LHP Eric O'Flaherty

RHP Ryan Cook

RHP Luke Gregerson

LHP Fernando Abad

RHP Jesse Chavez

CATCHERS:

John Jaso

Derek Norris

INFIELDERS:

1B Stephen Vogt

2B Alberto Callaspo

SS Eric Sogard

3B Josh Donaldson

INF Nate Freiman

INF Andy Parrino

OUTFIELDERS:

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LF Brandon Moss

CF Coco Crisp

RF Josh Reddick

OF Jonny Gomes

OF Sam Fuld