



Clips

(April 29, 2015)

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Jered Weaver struggles in Angels' 6-2 loss to Oakland Athletics

By Mike DiGiovanna

KEY MOMENT: After the A's loaded the bases with two outs in the bottom of the first inning, Angels starter Jered Weaver hung a first-pitch curveball to Josh Reddick, who smacked a tying two-run single to right field, and grooved a first-pitch fastball, middle in, to Brett Lawrie, who crushed a three-run homer to left. The five-run rally helped Oakland end a four-game losing streak.

AT THE PLATE: The Angels scored twice off Oakland starter Sonny Gray in the top of the first. Kole Calhoun walked and took third on Albert Pujols' single, Pujols took second on a wild pitch, and both runners scored on David Freese's single to center. But Gray blanked the Angels on four hits from the second through eighth innings to improve to 3-0 with a 1.98 earned-run average this season and 4-1 with a 2.42 ERA in eight career games against the Angels. The Angels have scored three runs or less in 12 of 20 games.

ON THE MOUND: Weaver pitched into the seventh for the first time this year and has gone three games without a walk, the longest stretch in his career. But a brutal first inning dropped the right-hander to 0-3 with a 5.83 ERA and left him winless after five starts for the first time in his career.

EXTRA BASES: Reliever Cam Bedrosian was optioned to triple A after the game, and right-hander Matt Shoemaker was activated off the bereavement list. . . . Catcher Chris Iannetta suffered a cut on a finger on his throwing hand Sunday and did not play Tuesday night..

UP NEXT: Shoemaker (2-1, 6.46 ERA) will oppose A's right-hander Jesse Hahn (1-1, 2.12 ERA) at O.co Coliseum Wednesday at 7 p.m. On the air: TV: FS West; Radio: 830.

Angels' Mike Scioscia confident Jered Weaver will 'figure it out'

By Mike DiGiovanna

The velocity of Jered Weaver's fastball is down, to 84-85 mph, and his earned run average is up, all the way to 5.83 after he allowed six runs and six hits, including two homers, in seven innings of a 6-2 loss to the Oakland Athletics on Tuesday night.

But manager Mike Scioscia remains confident that the veteran right-hander, who is 0-3 and has opened the season with five winless starts for the first time in his career, will return to his usually reliable and effective self.

"I think if he was throwing the ball as well as he could and hitting spots and had everything going and was getting hit, we'd be a little more concerned," Scioscia said. "But you can still see the up side with Jered. This guy just knows his way through a game. He knows what he's doing. He will figure this out."

Weaver gave up five of his six runs in the first inning, when, with the bases loaded, he hung a first-pitch breaking ball to Josh Reddick, who lined a two-run single to right field, and grooved a first-pitch fastball to Brett Lawrie, who crushed a three-run homer to left.

Then Weaver retired 12 straight and 15 of 16 batters before Reddick hit a solo homer to right with two out in the sixth for a 6-2 Oakland lead.

"I didn't do anything different [after the first inning], to tell you the truth," Weaver said. "There was just one blow-up inning. They got a five-spot. And that was the game."

Scioscia said he was encouraged by Weaver's final six innings, in which he allowed just two hits.

"One thing about Jered, he's not going to quit out there," Scioscia said. "He kept pitching. He's shown that when his command is there and he's hitting spots, he's effective. A couple pitches got away from him in the first, and they were hit. ... After the first, he mixed and matched the way he can, but the damage was done."

Mike Scioscia: Josh Hamilton's lack of accountability is disappointing

By Mike DiGiovanna

Mike Scioscia was the one voice of compassion from Angels management during the two-month-long Josh Hamilton saga.

While owner Arte Moreno, President John Carpino and General Manager Jerry Dipoto were highly critical of Hamilton after the outfielder suffered a substance-abuse relapse in February, the Angels' manager stressed the need for Hamilton to "get the help he needs."

But that support has its limits. Scioscia went on the offensive Tuesday before the game against the Oakland Athletics, criticizing Hamilton for not apologizing to Angels teammates during a news conference Monday to announce Hamilton's trade to the Texas Rangers.

"Just hearing some of his comments, the one thing that I think is sad, and I'm a little bit disappointed in, is the fact that there wasn't any accountability, most importantly, to his teammates," Scioscia said of Hamilton, who was either injured or slumping for much of his two seasons in Anaheim.

"If you look at how much support he got when he was struggling, whatever was happening ... no one ever questioned Josh's work ethic and him wanting to play well. I know he got a lot of support from the guys in that clubhouse. For him not to show at least a little remorse toward his teammates I just think is wrong."

Accountability was a point of contention between Moreno and Hamilton, who overcame a harrowing addiction to cocaine and alcohol to become a five-time All-Star with the Rangers from 2008-2012 but was a bust after signing a five-year, \$125-million deal with the Angels.

"We understand he's had struggles, but the reality is there's accountability," Moreno said after an arbitrator ruled on April 3 that Hamilton had not violated baseball's drug-treatment program and could not be suspended. "When you make an agreement, you need to stand up."

To which Hamilton replied, "I have no clue what he's talking about. [Moreno] knew what the deal was when he signed me. He knew what the risks were."

Scioscia also took exception to Hamilton's claim that "a lot of my support system was kind of removed or pushed away, and other pieces were added, not all by my doing."

The Angels hired Shayne Kelley as Hamilton's full-time "accountability partner" in 2013, and Hamilton chose to downsize the role in 2014, using family friend Boyd Bassham on trips and leaning on his wife, Katie, when the team was home. The couple filed for a divorce in early February.

"His support unit was totally dictated by Josh and his management team," Scioscia said. "I think we went above and beyond to make sure he had all the resources that he needed."

The sentiment in the Angels' clubhouse was one of happiness that Hamilton was reunited with the Rangers, even though the Angels will pay about \$60 million of the remaining \$80 million on Hamilton's contract for him to play for a division rival.

"He was a friend, a teammate and a good guy, and I hope the best for him on the field and off," right fielder Kole Calhoun said. "He's in the best possible spot, and we can all just kind of go on and get back to baseball."

Added reliever Joe Smith: "Josh as a person is way more important than the game of baseball. I wish him the best."

Closer Huston Street acknowledged the awkward position the players have been in, trying to support a teammate and fellow union member while trying to win a championship for an owner who refused to issue Hamilton a locker in the clubhouse and ordered Hamilton merchandise pulled from team stores.

"It's tough for us, because you want to show support for Josh, but you also play for the Angels organization," Street said. "You respect that. You want to win games for your teammates and for the name across your chest."

Street, who has been in negotiations with the Angels for weeks on a possible contract extension, said Moreno's treatment of Hamilton and the subsequent trade has in no way dimmed his desire to sign with the team before becoming a free agent.

"I respect the way the Angels handled it," Street said. "They had a position, and they stuck to that position. That was their belief. As the owner, that is your right."

FROM THE OC REGISTER

Josh Hamilton said he sent video to Rangers in March

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND -- Jerry Dipoto said by text Tuesday he was unaware that [Josh Hamilton sent video](#) of himself taking batting practice to the Rangers in March, but the Angels GM declined to comment further on it. Hamilton spoke to reporters Tuesday in Surprise, Ariz., where he had his first workout at the Rangers spring training complex since [Monday's trade](#).

"I sent video to the Rangers of me hitting March 9, full-go," Hamilton said.

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram cited a source saying Hamilton's video was sent to former teammate Michael Young, now a special assistant, and it was just two friends exchanging video, rather than Hamilton trying to manipulate a trade.

As long as the Rangers front office did not request the video, a tampering charge would seem unlikely. However, it's not likely the Angels front office would have been happy with Hamilton sending the video if they knew about it. If Hamilton was lobbying the Rangers to acquire him, it could have affected what little leverage the Angels might have had to make the best deal possible.

The revelation about the March 9 video also contradicts what the Angels had been saying about Hamilton's baseball readiness. The Angels said they did not issue Hamilton a locker in spring training because he was not ready for baseball activities following Feb. 4 shoulder surgery.

Angels Notes: Do Josh Hamilton savings help Huston Street?

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND – The Angels have cleared at least \$20 million off the books for the next three years by trading Josh Hamilton, which is of particular interest to Huston Street.

The Angels closer is seeking an extension, but so far he and the club haven't been able to match up financially.

"Logically speaking it hopefully helps the situation," Street said. "It seems like we have more money to spend. At the same time, at least from my perspective, (the negotiations and the Hamilton situation) haven't been intertwined."

Street, who is signed for \$7 million this year, has been looking for a four-year deal, superseding this year's contract, between \$36 million and \$46 million. The Angels have not been willing to go that high.

BAD MEMORIES

The current unrest in Baltimore, which has caused two Orioles games to be postponed and a third on Thursday to be played in an empty stadium, reminded Manager Mike Scioscia of what he went through 23 years ago. Scioscia played for the Dodgers during the 1992 riots following the Rodney King verdict. The Dodgers had an entire three-game series postponed.

"We had a meeting in the seventh inning and they were really concerned about guys getting out of Dodger Stadium," Scioscia said. "It was the real world. While you're in a baseball park that's the last thing you're thinking of. What's happened in Baltimore is almost a replay of what we went through in Los Angeles."

ALSO

The Angels optioned Cam Bedrosian to Triple-A after the game to make room for Matt Shoemaker, who was activated from the berevment list to start today. ...

On the day the Detroit Tigers announced that Kirk Gibson is battling Parkinson's, Scioscia said he's thinking of his former Dodgers teammate: "It's really sad. I know he's going to give everything he has, and he'll keep going and get back on a baseball field. That's what he loves. He loves being on a field. It's a sad day."...

Chris Iannetta was out of the lineup for the third time in the past five games, mostly because of a slump that has dropped his average to .100.

Mike Scioscia disappointed in Josh Hamilton's lack of 'accountability'

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND – When Josh Hamilton spoke in Arlington about his time with the Angels, his words made an impact on Mike Scioscia.

More specifically, what he didn't hear.

A day after the Angels officially ended their tumultuous relationship with Hamilton, Scioscia spoke sternly about Hamilton's lack of recognition for what he'd done to his former Angels teammates.

"Just hearing some of his comments, the one thing that I think is sad and I'm a little bit disappointed in is the fact that there wasn't any accountability, most importantly to his teammates," Scioscia said.

"If you look at how much support he got in that clubhouse, when he was struggling, whatever was happening, no one ever questioned Josh's work ethic and him wanting to play well. He played hard, nobody ever questioned that. I know he got a lot of support from the guys that are in that clubhouse. For him not to show at least a little remorse towards his teammates I just think is wrong."

Hamilton's two years in Anaheim were marked by poor performance and injuries, and this winter he suffered a relapse of drug use that created a deeper rift between the player and the club's management.

It got to the point that the Angels traded Hamilton back to the Texas Rangers, absorbing about 75 percent of the remainder of his contract along the way.

For whatever reason, the marriage between Hamilton and the Angels didn't work, and Scioscia said the club did its part.

"His support was totally dictated by Josh and his management team," Scioscia said. "They dictated what his support should be, and I think we went above and beyond to make sure he had all the resources that he needed."

While Scioscia expressed disappointment that Hamilton didn't show more remorse or contrition for what happened with the Angels, he said he still wants the best for Hamilton.

"I'm concerned with Josh the person," Scioscia said. "I think that he needs to get that help and support, and hopefully he'll find that peace."

Elsewhere in the Angels clubhouse, players simply wished Hamilton well and expressed satisfaction that the saga seemed to be over, although they all insisted that it was never a distraction to them.

“There are a lot of people in your life you care about that aren’t in this clubhouse, and any one of those people can provide a distraction,” Huston Street said. “When you think about it from that perspective, we all have families and kids. We all cared about what happened to Josh, but it was also separate. You handle that on your own time. You come in here to be a professional and play baseball.”

Kole Calhoun, one of the players who met with Hamilton in Houston earlier this month, said he was happy that Hamilton will be able to play again.

“For him to get back to a comfort zone, a baseball field, a clubhouse, will be good for him,” Calhoun said.

One bad inning costs Angels, Jered Weaver in 6-2 loss to A's

By Jeff Fletcher

OAKLAND – Although Jered Weaver certainly isn’t panicking over his bad start to the level of many Angels fans, he’s still pretty ticked off about it.

Weaver’s winless streak reached five games – the longest season-opening drought of his career – in the Angels’ 6-2 loss to the Oakland A’s on Tuesday night.

“It’s definitely frustrating,” he said. “My M.O. is to try to keep us in it, and I wasn’t able to do that tonight.”

Weaver could have taken encouragement in the fact that he gave up only one run on two hits over the last six innings he pitched.

Or the fact that he hasn’t walked a batter in three games, the longest streak of his career.

Or the fact that he got through the seventh for the first time this year.

No. All of that was washed away by one bad inning. Weaver gave up five runs in the first inning, when Josh Reddick singled home two runs on a first-pitch breaking ball and Brett Lawrie pumped the next pitch, a belt-high fastball, for a three-run homer.

“I didn’t do anything different (after the first), to tell you the truth,” Weaver said. “Just one blowup inning. They got a five spot. And that was the game.”

Although Weaver then retired 12 in a row and 19 of the last 22 batters he faced, it was too late.

Weaver’s bad first inning put the A’s in a 5-2 hole against A’s ace Sonny Gray, who bounced back from his two-run first inning to keep the Angels off the board for the rest of his eight innings.

One loss in the first game of a three-game set against the A’s was not as important as the bigger picture questions raised by Weaver’s performance.

The line – six runs allowed – certainly gives little reason for optimism that the Angels longtime ace is figuring it out. He now has a 5.83 ERA. In five starts, he's had two quality starts, and in one of those he was walking a tightrope the entire night, scattering eight hits in six innings.

The radar gun also raises questions. Weaver (0-3) continues to throw fastballs in the 82-85 mph range, a few ticks below what he is when he's at his best.

Despite all that, Manager Mike Scioscia sees reasons not to panic.

In 2012, Weaver went 20-5, with a fastball that averaged 88 mph, still relatively modest by major league standards. He was averaging 84.3 mph coming into Tuesday night's game.

"His stuff is not that far away from when he won 20 games," Scioscia said. "At times, you'll see the ball come out like you expect with Jered, but right now, he's trying to find a release point and a mechanical solution that will let him be in sync to where his complicated delivery adds deception but gets him that crisp fastball. Right now, it's something he's searching for, and he's really not that far away. His stuff is still going to play and in a big way."

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

By Jeff Fletcher

Where: O.co Coliseum

TV: Fox Sports West, 7 p.m.

Did you know: Angels closer Huston Street, who began his career with the A's, has converted 93 percent of his save opportunities since 2011, most in the majors.

THE PITCHERS

RHP MATT SHOEMAKER (2-1, 6.46)

Shoemaker's second season as a regular member of a big league rotation has not started well. His first two outings were passable, but he gave up five runs and seven hits in three innings of an April 20 loss to the A's. He also walked three, which is particularly uncharacteristic for him. Shoemaker then went on bereavement leave.

Vs. A's: 1-1, 4.35

At O.co Coliseum: First game

Loves to face: Josh Reddick, 0 for 4 (.000)

Hates to face: Billy Butler, 3 for 5 (.600)

RHP JESSE HAHN (2-0, 1.91)

The rookie will return to the rotation for the first time in more than a week. He was scratched from a scheduled start against the Angels in Anaheim because of a blister. Hahn, who was acquired from the San Diego Padres in the Derek Norris deal, pitched 5 1/3 scoreless innings in his last start, on April 18 against the Royals. Hahn was a sixth-round pick of the Tampa Bay Rays in 2010, so he's on his third organization.

Vs. Angels: First game

At O.co Coliseum: 0-1, 3.09

Loves to face: None

Hates to face: None

FROM ANGELS.COM

Inbox: What's next for Angels after Hamilton deal?

By Alden Gonzalez

What's your opinion on the Hamilton saga?

-- @Migui_Chingon

I think this was the best possible outcome for a bad scenario. An appropriate rebuttal would be that it shouldn't have come to this -- that the Angels should have at least let Hamilton fully rehab his injury to show what he's got, then see what the market holds thereafter. But Angels owner Arte Moreno no longer wanted him on the team. He felt betrayed by Hamilton's relapse and upset by the fact he never personally apologized for it. You can disagree with the logic -- many do -- but ultimately, a split became inevitable.

So for the last three months, the Angels' front office basically sorted through ways to part with Hamilton. They talked about one-for-one deals and multiteam trades, but every one of them "ultimately would've led him back to the Rangers," a source said. It's the only organization Hamilton wanted to play for, because it's where he thrived -- and more importantly, playing there meant being close to his daughters. Hamilton, who has a full no-trade clause, never officially used his veto power to void a trade to another team, according to the source, who was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Other suitors didn't necessarily materialize, either.

The Angels would've traded Hamilton over the offseason, even before the relapse, if another team had shown worthwhile interest. One never did. They felt Hamilton's trade market was irreparable; that even sending him on a rehab assignment wouldn't make much of a difference. The Rangers were the only team that made sense. The Angels had been going back and forth with them since the middle of March, and it wasn't until Hamilton agreed to restructure his contract that a deal got done. The fact he was even willing to do that shows how badly he wanted to return.

Hamilton, who filed for divorce from his wife earlier this year, has a lot of personal issues to deal with right now. Playing in Southern California was not going to do him much good, especially not after the relationship with the Angels became so fractured. This trade -- with Hamilton going back home and the Angels saving some money -- at the very least kept this scenario from getting any uglier and any more awkward.

With Hamilton going to Texas and Matt Joyce playing poorly, do you see the Angels trading for an outfielder soon?

-- @ZachMartin619

The Angels will eventually make additions. I'm not so sure about "soon" -- it's always best to wait until the market opens up in June or July -- but I expect them to eventually. The Angels opened the season roughly \$12 million below the luxury-tax threshold, which has basically acted as their spending limit the last few years. The Hamilton deal puts them somewhere between \$16 million and \$19 million below.

The Rangers are paying the Angels about \$7 million through the 2017 season and Hamilton is now making roughly \$12 million less than he was scheduled to earn. I expect the Angels to use those savings to help an offense that entered Tuesday ranked 24th in the Majors in OPS. What kind of player they get will probably depend on how the next couple months go for Joyce, C.J. Cron and Johnny Giavotella.

Do you think there is going to be a long-term effect between players and ownership regarding Hamilton? C.J. Wilson has already spoken out. Do you think the other players see this as a distraction?

-- Tony F.

Mike Scioscia stated at almost every turn that whatever was going on between Hamilton and the Angels' front office was not a distraction in his clubhouse. But to some degree, it was. Players had no idea what was going on, and they didn't know how to answer the questions about Hamilton. They wanted to show support for a teammate, but they didn't want to seem like they were criticizing the people who write their checks.

Hamilton's infectious personality won him a lot of friends, a handful of whom were upset to see the Angels handle the situation the way they did. But I think a lot of the players -- the majority, perhaps -- were essentially indifferent. Clubhouses generally aren't as tight-knit as fans seem to think. They pull for each other, but they also understand that it's a business and that turnover is frequent. So they just focus on their own job.

I think a lot of the Angels' players are simply happy to have closure, so they can at least move on with the rest of their season.

Street unsure Hamilton trade will aid extension talks

By Alden Gonzalez

OAKLAND -- Now that the Angels have closure with Josh Hamilton, who was sent back to the Rangers in a trade that was finalized on Monday, the organization has a clearer picture of its financial situation over the next three years.

Angels closer Huston Street hopes that means good news for his extension -- even though it probably doesn't.

"Selfishly speaking, I hope it helps my situation," Street said. "I've been clear about [what he wants in a deal] with the organization, they've been clear about it with me. It hasn't seemed like the Josh situation has had any effect. If we would have changed our position, we probably could have gotten something done, and if they would have changed their position, we could have gotten something done."

Street -- self-represented, until rehiring Alan Hendricks as his agent when the regular season began -- said at the start of Spring Training that he was seeking a four-year contract between \$36 and \$46 million. The Angels would probably be more comfortable with a three-year deal for Street, who's 31 and would be eligible for free agency at season's end.

Both sides are open to continuing negotiations, but neither side has apparently budged.

If a deal does get done, it probably won't have anything to do with the fact the Angels saved roughly \$20 million on the remainder of Hamilton's contract.

"Logically speaking, it hopefully helps the situation" Street said. "It seems like we have more money to spend. But at the same time, at least from my perspective, they haven't been intertwined. It's just been a conversation between us and them about where we both want to be, and we're still working through that."

Some additional notes from Tuesday ...

- Catcher Chris Iannetta was out of the starting lineup after cutting a finger in his right hand a couple days earlier. Iannetta is fine, though. Manager Mike Scioscia mainly wanted to give him a day off because his batting average sits at .100 through his first 50 at-bats "He'll be in there tomorrow," Scioscia said.
- Scioscia on Kirk Gibson, his former Dodgers teammate who was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's disease: "This is tough. He's always been a competitor; I know he'll never give in. But to hear what his battle is now with Parkinson's, it's really sad. I know he's going to give it everything he has and keep going, and get back on a baseball field. That's what he loves. It's a sad day. Sad day."
- The unrest in Baltimore, which prompted two Orioles games to be postponed and Wednesday's contest to be played in an empty stadium, reminded Scioscia of the 1992 riots following the Rodney King verdict. Those riots caused the Dodgers' entire three-game series to be postponed.

"We had a meeting in the seventh inning and they were really concerned about guys getting out of Dodger Stadium," Scioscia said. "It was the real world. While you're in a baseball park, that's the last thing you're thinking of. What's happened in Baltimore is almost a replay of what we went through in Los Angeles."

Weaver, Angels thwarted by A's 5-run frame

By Alden Gonzalez

OAKLAND -- Brett Lawrie blasted a three-run homer to highlight a five-run first inning and Sonny Gray cruised from there, leading the A's to a 6-2 win over the Angels on Tuesday night at the Coliseum.

The win snapped a four-game losing streak for the A's, who moved to 9-12 and dropped the Angels to 9-11.

"After losing four in a row, it could have been easy for us to turn the switch off," Gray said. "But we responded."

Gray gave up two first-inning runs on a single by David Freese, but nothing else. The righty logged eight innings, scattering six hits, walking one and striking out six to put his ERA at 1.98. Angels starter Jered Weaver completed seven innings, but he couldn't fully recover from a rough first inning and is now winless in his first five starts for the first time in his career.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Brett's blast: In the matter of a few minutes, Oakland wiped out its early 2-0 deficit by jumping all over Weaver for five runs in the first. The frame was highlighted by Lawrie's no-doubt, three-run shot to left field on the first pitch he saw from Weaver. After recording four RBIs through his first 18 games with the A's, Lawrie has driven in six the past two contests combined.

"I think it was a heater up," Lawrie said. "Happy to put up some runs for the boys and help Sonny out." **Recovering nicely:** Weaver's first time completing seven innings this season came in a start in which he gave up five first-inning runs. Weird, and a testament to how well the veteran right-hander recovered from a demoralizing start. Weaver retired 12 consecutive batters after Lawrie's homer. His only mistake the rest of the night was allowing a solo shot to Josh Reddick in the sixth. Amazingly, Weaver completed six innings with only 86 pitches.

Finishing strong: Gray was uncharacteristically wild to begin his evening, as he allowed five hits and a walk through the first two frames. But he faced the minimum 18 batters over his final six innings of work, with the only single he allowed wiped out by a double play.

Botched hit and run: The Angels had a chance to rally once again in the second, after Matt Joyce led off with a single -- only his ninth hit in 58 at-bats this season. But with one out, the Angels could not execute a hit-and-run. Drew Butera awkwardly swung through a breaking ball and Joyce was subsequently thrown out at second. Butera and Johnny Giavotella followed with back-to-back singles, but the Angels didn't score that inning, or any other inning the rest of the way.

QUOTABLE

"This guy just knows his way through a game. He knows what he's doing. He will figure this out." -- Angels manager Mike Scioscia, expressing confidence in Weaver despite a tough start to the season

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Weaver's 10th season is off to a rough start, at 0-3 with a 5.83 ERA. But at least he's pounding the strike zone. The ace didn't issue a walk for the third straight start on Tuesday. He's never done that in his career.

WHAT'S NEXT

Angels: Matt Shoemaker, previously on the bereavement list to deal with a personal matter, gets the ball in the second of a three-game series on Wednesday at 7:05 p.m. PT. The 28-year-old right-hander had one of the worst starts of his young career eight days earlier, giving up five runs on seven hits and three walks in three innings against the A's.

A's: Right-hander Jesse Hahn will return to the mound on Wednesday after sitting out his last start with a blister on his middle finger. The 25-year-old has posted a 2.12 ERA in 17 innings this season, but he hasn't pitched in a game since April 18.

Weaver frustrated over going winless in April

By Alden Gonzalez

OAKLAND -- Angels starter Jered Weaver recovered from a nightmare start to somehow complete seven innings in Tuesday's 6-2 loss to the A's, but it was no consolation. The right-hander went a third straight outing without allowing a single walk, something Weaver has never done throughout his 10-year career, but he couldn't care less.

All Weaver knows is that he'll end the month of April without a win, and it isn't sitting well. "It's definitely frustrating," a terse Weaver said. "My M.O. is to try to keep us in it, and I wasn't able to do that tonight."

Weaver is 0-3 with a 5.83 ERA, and winless through his first five starts for the first time ever. He combined to give up just three runs in 12 innings in his last two starts against the Astros and A's, showing signs that he may be rounding into form.

Then, Weaver gave up five runs in the first inning of the series opener at the Coliseum, turning a two-run lead into a five-run deficit. He allowed back-to-back singles to Marcus Semien and Stephen Vogt, plunked Billy Butler, yielded a two-out, two-run single to Josh Reddick and served up a three-run homer to Brett Lawrie, on a first-pitch, chest-high, 84-mph fastball.

"The inning blew up on me," Weaver said. "I was able to settle in after that, but it was too late." Weaver retired the next 12 batters, completed six innings with only 86 pitches, pitched into the seventh for the first time this season and made only one more mistake the rest of the night, resulting in Reddick's sixth-inning solo homer.

But the Angels are still waiting for their ace to completely round into form.

"If he was throwing the ball as well as he could and hitting spots and had everything going, and was getting hit, we'd be a little more concerned," manager Mike Scioscia said. "But you can still see the upside with Jered. This guy just knows his way through a game. He knows what he's doing. He will figure this out."

But Weaver's velocity continues to dip, an unavoidable topic considering how much more precise it forces him to be. He went from an average fastball velocity of 86.8 mph in 2014 to 84.3 mph in his first four starts of 2015. On Tuesday, only three of Weaver's 98 pitches were thrown 85 mph or higher, according to Pitch Fx.

"His stuff is not that far away from when he won 20 games," Scioscia said of Weaver, who got to 20 wins in 2012 and led the American League with 18 wins last season.

"At times, you'll see the ball come out like you expect with Jered, but right now, he's trying to find a release point and a mechanical solution that will let him be in sync to where his complicated delivery adds deception but gets him that crisp fastball. Right now, it's something he's searching for, and he's really not that far away. His stuff is still going to play, and in a big way."

Hahn set for return in middle clash against Angels

By Alex Espinosa

Both starters for the A's and the Angels might be fighting off some rust when they take the mound on Wednesday.

While the A's waited until Tuesday to clear right-hander Jesse Hahn fit for action after he missed his last start with a blister, the Angels announced Matt Shoemaker's return from the bereavement list following Tuesday night's game. Hahn hasn't pitched in a game since April 18 and Shoemaker hasn't seen action since April 20.

"It's just something I hope stays minor and doesn't get worse as we go," Hahn said of the blister on his right middle finger. "Hope it's something we can put behind us."

Three things to know

- The Angels placed Shoemaker on the bereavement list on April 22 following the death of his grandfather. His last time out, the A's roughed him up for five earned runs on seven hits and three walks over three innings. In three starts this season, the right-hander is 2-1 with a 6.46 ERA and 14-to-4 strikeout-to-walk ratio.
- Hahn has looked sharp to begin his career in Oakland since being acquired from the Padres this offseason. The 25-year-old posted a 2.12 ERA in his 17 innings over three outings before being sidelined by the blister. This will mark his first career start against the Angels.
- To make room for Shoemaker on the roster, the Angels optioned Cam Bedrosian to Triple-A Salt Lake. The 23-year-old right-hander pitched three scoreless innings out of the bullpen in his short stint with the Angels. Now, Jose Alvarez will probably be used as a long reliever.

FROM THE LA DAILY NEWS

Angels' Jered Weaver gets roughed up by Oakland Athletics in 6-2 loss

By Gideon Rubin

OAKLAND >> The decline of a veteran pitcher's velocity is inevitable. How they adapt to it can define the later years of a distinguished career.

Jered Weaver, who's in his 10th year with the Angels at age 32, is trying to figure it out with a fastball that barely tops out over 85 mph, well below the 90-plus mph heat he threw during his prep days at Simi Valley High.

The early returns suggest the three-time all-star's transformation might not be so easy.

Weaver's shaky start to the season continued on Tuesday in a 6-2 loss to Oakland in front of 17,674 at O.Co Coliseum.

Weaver (0-3) extended his career-worst streak of season-opening winless starts to five.

"His stuff is not that far away from when he won 20 ballgames (in 2012)," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

"At times you'll see the ball come out like you would expect it with Jered, but right now he's trying to find a release point — a mechanical solution that will let him be in synch to where his complicated delivery has deception but gets him that crisp fastball, but right now that's something he's searching for."

Weaver's most recent outing saw his ERA shoot up from 5.24 to 5.83.

"It's definitely frustrating," Weaver said. "My (modus operandi) is to go out there and try to keep us in it, and I wasn't able to do it tonight."

He allowed six runs (all earned) on six hits and a hit batsmen in seven innings. He had one strikeout and for the third straight game and the fourth time this season he allowed no walks.

Small comfort for Weaver on what he acknowledged was a bad night.

"Regardless of whether you walk people or not, if you give up five runs an inning, it's not going to go too good," he said.

The Angels led 2-0 going into a disastrous bottom of the first inning that set the tone for the game. The five-run outburst started with Marcus Semien reaching on an infield hit in the hole shortstop Erick Aybar fielded in short left field. It ended with a Brett Lawrie crushing a first pitch fastball for a 399-foot three-run homer to left center.

Asked if he thought Lawrie saw the pitch coming Weaver said, "seemed like it."

Weaver settled down nicely after that, retiring the next 12 batters in order before Semien poked a single to left. The A's extended their lead to 6-2 in the sixth when Josh Reddick homered to right off Weaver on a 1-2 pitch.

Weaver retired 16 of the last 18 batters he faced.

Catcher Drew Butera said Weaver is getting better at taking something off his breaking ball and pitching to locations to help increase the perceived velocity of his pitches.

"He's pitching," Butera said.

Weaver struggled against an A's team he's had considerable success against. Over his previous 11 starts against Oakland, Weaver was 7-2 with a 1.79 ERA.

The Angels took an early lead off A's starter Sonny Gray (3-0) when Kole Calhoun drew a leadoff walk to start a two-run inning.

Gray struck out six batters and allowed two runs on six hits and one walk.

"I thought he kept himself together," Butera said. "After that (first) inning, to throw seven innings you tip your cap to a guy like that. He could have easily folded but he's a professional and he battled the rest of the game, found a rhythm.

Notes: After Tuesday night's game, the Angels announced Matt Shoemaker will start tonight's game against the A's. ... The Angels optioned reliever Cam Bedrosian to Triple-A Salt Lake to make room on their roster for Shoemaker.

Angels manager Mike Scioscia says Josh Hamilton should have expressed remorse to former teammates

By Gideon Rubin

OAKLAND >> Speaking publicly for the first time since the Angels dealt embattled outfielder Josh Hamilton back to the Texas Rangers, manager Mike Scioscia on Tuesday took aim at the former American League MVP for comments he made during an introductory press conference with the Rangers on Monday.

Specifically, Scioscia expressed disappointment at what Hamilton didn't say, calling out his former player for not apologizing to former teammates who Scioscia insists were fiercely loyal to Hamilton during his turbulent two-plus years in Anaheim.

The trade culminates a public feud between Hamilton and the Angels that began when Hamilton self-reported a substance abuse relapse to the commissioner's office in February. The Angels, according to published reports, remain on the hook for approximately \$68 million on the last three years of a five-year, \$125 million contract Hamilton signed ahead of the 2013 season.

"Just in hearing some of his comments, the one thing that I think is sad, and I'm a little disappointed in, is the fact that there wasn't any accountability, most importantly to his teammates," Scioscia said.

“I think if you look at how much support he got in that clubhouse when he was struggling, whatever was happening, nobody ever questioned Josh’s work ethic and wanting to do well or wanting to play well. He worked hard. Nobody ever questioned that. He got a lot of support from the guys who were in the clubhouse, and for him not to show at least a little remorse towards his teammates, I just think is wrong.”

Asked what he wanted to hear from Hamilton specifically, Scioscia said, “I’m just leaving it at that. I think I said it all.”

Hamilton’s former teammates, also speaking publicly for the first time since the trade, dismissed the notion that the ongoing saga was a distraction.

But closer Huston Street acknowledged that the situation presented challenges to the Angels clubhouse.

“For us it was more about playing the game and it was tough for us because you wanted to show support for Josh as a friend and as a teammate, but you also play for the Angels organization and you respect that,” Street said. “You want to go out on the field and win games for your teammates and the name across your chest.”

MEMORIES OF 1992

Violent protests in Baltimore triggered by the death of an African-American man in police custody led to the postponement of two games and the announcement that Wednesday’s game at Camden Yards against the White Sox will be played in front of an empty stadium.

That brought back vivid memories of the April 1992 riots in Los Angeles in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict, Scioscia said.

The former Dodgers catcher recalled an impromptu clubhouse meeting in the seventh inning of a game at Dodger Stadium, noting team officials expressing concern about the epicenter of the rioting on Florence and Normandie avenues was just a few miles from the stadium. Players were advised to “stay north if you could” leaving the stadium.

“It’s just the real world” intruding on baseball, Scioscia said. “When you’re in a baseball park, it’s the last thing you think of whether you’re playing or watching, so I think what happened in Baltimore certainly was almost a replay of what we went through in Los Angeles.”

FROM ESPN

Was Hamilton worst free-agent signing of all time?

By Jayson Stark

Poor Josh Hamilton. He might have been freed from captivity in Southern California. But he goes right to the top of a list nobody wants to join:

The Worst Free-Agent Signings of All Time.

And trust me. That's a tough list to top. But here's my new, updated, post-Josh-a-palooza top five, with a few honorable mentions thrown in there for your second-guessing consideration:

1 – Josh Hamilton (5 years, \$125 million)

OK, I know what you're thinking: Was he really THAT bad – bad enough to rank above the other names on this list?

Well, I'll concede the guy did have a 21-homer, 32-double season in his first year with the Angels. And his 3.0 Wins Above Replacement over two seasons tops the total value of nearly every other player I considered for this prestigious honor.

But the Hamilton deal gets massive extra credit for its messy ending alone. His team didn't just eat over \$60 million to make him go away. The Angels were so desperate to get him off the premises, they were willing to "trade" him for pretty much nothing. To a team in their own division. Amidst a bizarre backdrop of embarrassment, frustration and (let's face it) anger. So in the end, they paid him over 100 million bucks for, well, what exactly?

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Josh Hamilton has first workout with Rangers

SURPRISE, Ariz. — Josh Hamilton has spent the past 11 weeks lifting weights, shagging fly balls, taking swings, running bases, rehabilitating his surgically repaired right shoulder.

Though brief, the workout he went through Tuesday had a much different feel to it.

The uniform, the logo on his hat, the nameplate on his locker, the crack of balls being hit, the camaraderie with fellow players, even if they weren't going to be his actual teammates — all of it meant he was a part of a team again and the Texas slugger couldn't have enjoyed it any more.

"I was on my own, removed from the game," Hamilton said. "It was humbling to still work and still put the time and effort in, not knowing what the outcome was going to be. But I really feel blessed, like it was a miracle to end up here again."

Hamilton's pothole-filled journey brought him to the Rangers' spring training facility in the desert looking for a fresh start.

Following a self-admitted cocaine and alcohol relapse during the off-season, the prodigiously talented outfielder was back in uniform Tuesday after being traded from the Los Angeles Angels back to Texas, where he went to the World Series twice and was the 2010 AL MVP.

Hamilton had a difficult two seasons in Los Angeles after signing a five-year, \$125 million contract, struggling with injuries and performance, culminating with a 0-for-13 playoff performance and his off-season relapse.

Despite an arbitrator determining Major League Baseball could not punish Hamilton, the Angels made it clear they no longer wanted him and paid a hefty price — absorbing most of the \$80.2 million of his remaining salary — to trade him to Texas.

The Rangers are banking on Hamilton straightening his life out after another in a long line of slipups.

Hamilton said he will be tested five times a week for drug and alcohol use, and expects to remain on track after bringing back the support system that had been removed or pushed away from his life.

"Just continue putting people around me, bringing people back around me and certainty who were there in my life when things were going good and things were working," he said. "That's the most important thing."

Hamilton had a news conference in Texas on Monday and originally planned to fly to Arizona that night, but decided to stay home to spend time with his four daughters, who treated dad to a little eye makeup.

Though tired from getting up at 3:30 a.m. to catch a flight, not to mention having irritated eyes from the makeup, Hamilton was eager to get back onto a baseball field as part of an organization again.

He arrived at the spring training complex the Rangers share with the Kansas City Royals around 9:30 a.m., wearing a plaid shirt and jeans while carrying a Rangers gear bag as he casually greeted a group of reporters who had been waiting for his arrival.

Hamilton went through some stretching and light jogging on one of the outer fields, then played a little long toss before heading to the batting cages, where he hit off a tee.

The session lasted little more than an hour and didn't involve a whole lot of exertion, but it sure felt good.

"It's been tough the past 11 weeks or so, not knowing what's going to happen, where I was going to be and everything that was transpiring was tough," Hamilton said. "It's good to have something that's been so consistent in my life back in it again. It's going to be fun to go out there and do more and more every day."

Hamilton expects to have another light day on Wednesday, maybe adding some swings off a pitching machine, then gradually building up his workouts.

He's expected to be at extended spring training for about 10 days, then start a rehab assignment with Triple-A Round Rock. His goal is to get a call-up back to the big leagues sometime in mid- to late May and, hopefully, get his career back on track.

It's been a long, difficult journey and this stop with the Rangers is likely Hamilton's last chance, so he hopes to make the most of it.

A moment at the Rangers' training complex reminded him of how far he has come: Walking off the field, a group of young San Diego Padres players stopped and asked to take photos with him, one telling Hamilton he was his favourite player.

"It was a good feeling," Hamilton said. "The biggest thing it reminded me of was where I've been and what a long road it's been, the ups and downs, good and bad. The whole thing makes me feel appreciative."

Mike Scioscia 'disappointed' Josh Hamilton showed no remorse, thanks

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- Josh Hamilton's teammates with the Los Angeles Angels all seemed to hope the outfielder would shake off his latest troubles and return to stardom in their lineup.

Moments after Hamilton was traded back to the Texas Rangers on Monday, the Angels headed off on their next road trip knowing they'll have to fix their slow-starting season without him -- and without a clear replacement for him in left field.

"I think it has the best possible ending for all parties," Angels closer Huston Street said Tuesday in Oakland. "Josh is where he clearly wants to be, or feels the most comfortable and has had a lot of success. The organization, they worked that out with him. That's good for everybody. For the guys in here, I don't think it was necessarily a distraction."

Mike Trout and C.J. Wilson were among several Angels who remained passionately supportive of Hamilton while team management publicly ripped the former AL MVP following his latest struggle with sobriety this spring.

Manager Mike Scioscia said he thought Hamilton should have expressed "remorse" to those teammates who so graciously stuck by him.

"For him not to show at least a little remorse toward his teammates I just think is wrong," Scioscia said. "It's unfortunate he had his relapse but I know we supported him in every aspect whatever his needs were. Just in hearing some of his comments, the one thing I think is sad and I'm a little bit disappointed is the fact that there wasn't any accountability most importantly to his teammates."

When news of Hamilton's imminent departure leaked last weekend, the Angels reacted mostly with muted disappointment, finally understanding the depth of owner Arte Moreno's displeasure with their underperforming teammate.

"From the moment he got here, there has been turbulence," Angels general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "If I could put my finger on why there was such a struggle, we could have corrected it."

Instead, the free-spending Moreno addressed it with money. Just two years after he bestowed a \$125 million contract on Hamilton, the owner sent the slugger to an AL West rival. The Angels are responsible for \$105 million over the five-year deal, with Texas paying \$6 million and Hamilton giving up \$14 million.

"Why would it come back to haunt us?" Dipoto asked. "We're comfortable with the decision here."

With this off-field drama finally finished, the Angels can focus on fixing their problems on the field. After ending their five-year playoff absence last season, the Angels are off to yet another middling start at 9-10 heading into Tuesday's game against the Athletics.

"It was tough for us, because you wanted to show support for Josh as a friend and as a teammate, but you also play for the Angels organization and you respect that," said Street, who is currently working to negotiate what he hopes is his own new multiyear deal with the Angels.

"You want to go out on the field and win games for your teammates and for the name across your chest. The way it has worked out, I think everybody can just move forward in a positive way. I was happy to see the resolution turn out the way it did."

The Angels will get almost nothing from Texas for Hamilton, so the most tangible asset from the trade is increased space under the luxury tax threshold.

That should allow Moreno and Dipoto to address one of the biggest potential problems with the deal for Angels fans: While Hamilton was thoroughly disappointing for the Angels, they don't have a better player to take over in left field.

Los Angeles acquired Matt Joyce from Tampa Bay in the offseason, while Collin Cowgill and Efrén Navarro also have played in left field at times in April. Joyce is off to a miserable 8-for-57 start in Anaheim, but Navarro and Cowgill also can't top .200 yet.

The Angels are 19th in runs scored this season after leading the majors with 773 last year. Hamilton played only a supporting role in that success, and his absence means much less to the current team's struggles than the offseason trade of hits leader Howie Kendrick to the Dodgers for pitching prospect Andrew Heaney, who is in the minors.

Hamilton ranks right near the top of a long list of high-priced failures for the Angels, who have a franchise tradition of overpaying for overripe talent:

- Mo Vaughn got a six-year, \$80 million deal in late 1998 but provided only two solid offensive years before missing an entire season with injuries and eventually getting traded.
- Gary Matthews Jr. got a five-year, \$50 million contract from Moreno in 2007 but never batted above .252 in three seasons before the Angels ate \$21.5 million to ship him to the Mets.
- The Angels acquired Vernon Wells from Toronto in 2011, giving up slugging catcher Mike Napoli for a player still owed most of a backloaded \$126 million contract. Wells stumbled through two awful seasons before the Angels ate another \$28.1 million to send him to the Yankees.
- One high-risk contract has been decent so far: Albert Pujols is still manning first base for the Angels in the fourth season of his 10-year, \$240 million free-agent deal, although his steady hitting doesn't compare to his St. Louis heyday. But Pujols will be 41 years old by the time the Angels are finally free of their obligations to the slugger.

Sonny Gray strikes out 6 to pitch Athletics past Angels

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Sonny Gray found himself facing a rare early deficit, and the Oakland Athletics came out swinging to get him right back on track.

Gray kept slugger Mike Trout off the bases all game and struck him out twice. Brett Lawrie brought his power stroke and the A's snapped a season-high four-game losing streak with a 6-2 victory over the Los Angeles Angels on Tuesday night.

Gray struck out six and walked one over eight impressive innings to beat the Angels for the second time in seven days. Lawrie hit a three-run homer in the first inning that Gray made stand up.

"That was huge. It gave me a little shot in the arm there," Gray said. "For us to respond with a five-spot, I knew then that I need to come back out and put up zeros for the guys."

Oakland won for the first time this season when its opponent scored first.

Josh Reddick hit a solo homer and a two-run single to back Gray (3-0), who retired 13 straight batters during one stretch to help the A's avoid dropping to five games below .500 for the first time since June 30, 2012. Oakland bounced back against the defending AL West champions after being swept at home over the weekend by first-place Houston.

"We knew that the boys were ready to go today," Lawrie said. "We knew it wasn't going to stop in the first inning. Even though they did put up a couple, we knew that we had a lot of fight in us. That's the type of team we are."

Gray allowed two runs and six hits in his 105-pitch day. He lowered his ERA to 1.98 before Evan Scribner struck out the side in order to finish the 2-hour, 6-minute game.

It was the A's fastest 9-inning game since June 6, 2012, when a game against the Texas Rangers took 2:04.

David Freese hit a two-run single on his 32nd birthday in the first inning but the A's answered immediately in the bottom half. The Angels were limited to three or fewer runs for the seventh time in 10 games after they led the majors in runs with 773 in 2014.

"Freese reaches out ... I threw that same pitch probably 15 times and got outs with it," Gray said.

Gray improved to 4-1 over seven starts and eight career appearances against the Angels, who played their first game since the trade of left fielder Josh Hamilton to Texas became final during Monday's day off.

Jered Weaver (0-3) remained winless in five starts to begin the season -- the first time in his career he has started 0-3. Facing Oakland for his second straight outing, the right-hander allowed six runs and six hits in seven innings, struck out one and didn't walk a batter for the fourth time this season.

Weaver, an 18-game winner last season, retired 12 straight batters after Lawrie's second home run of the year before Marcus Semien's two-out single in the fifth.

"It's not the way I wanted to start it off," Weaver said. "The inning just blew up on me. I was able to settle in after that but it was too late."

The Angels opened a six-game Bay Area road trip that includes a weekend interleague series against the World Series champion San Francisco Giants at AT&T Park. Los Angeles is in a stretch with 25 straight games in its home state.

Los Angeles starting pitchers had gone 3-0 with a 1.50 ERA with 30 strikeouts over the previous six games.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: C Chris Iannetta was held out as a precaution with a cut on a finger of his throwing hand but was expected to play Wednesday night.

Athletics: CF Coco Crisp, recovering from surgery on his right elbow, hit soft toss in the cage and could take regular batting practice Friday before heading out on a rehab assignment with Class-A Stockton this weekend. ... INF/OF Ben Zobrist underwent successful arthroscopic surgery on his left knee, performed by Dr. Jon Dickinson in San Francisco. ... RHP Jesse Hahn, whose turn in the rotation was skipped as he healed a blister on the tip of the middle finger on his throwing hand, is ready to go Wednesday night. ... RHP A.J. Griffin (reconstructive elbow surgery last year) visited from Arizona to throw in front of the major league staff. He is using all his pitches except for his cut fastball.

UP NEXT

Angels: Matt Shoemaker (2-1) will be activated from the bereavement list and make his fourth start of the year. RHP Cam Bedrosian is being optioned to Triple-A Salt Lake.

Athletics: Hahn (1-1) pitches for the first time since combining on a seven-hit shutout in a 5-0 win at Kansas City on April 18.

Angels-Athletics Preview

Mike Trout put together an impressive hitting streak to open the season, but he's fallen on harder times in the batter's box more recently.

It's likely no coincidence that Los Angeles' offense is struggling as a whole, too.

Trout and the Angels will try to avoid their third three-game skid of the season Wednesday night against the Oakland Athletics.

Los Angeles (9-11) has been held to three runs or fewer seven times during a 4-6 stretch, recording only six hits in Tuesday's 6-2 loss in Oakland. Trout had been batting .444 while collecting at least one hit in each of his first 10 games, but is 5 for 34 (.147) with 12 strikeouts over his last 10 after going 0 for 4 and getting rung up on strikes three times.

Meanwhile, Josh Reddick continued his torrid stretch for the Athletics (9-12), going 2 for 4 with his second home run. He is 14 for 30 with nine RBIs over his last nine games.

Brett Lawrie also had a three-run shot as Oakland snapped a four-game skid.

"We knew that the boys were ready to go today," Lawrie said. "We knew it wasn't going to stop in the first inning. Even though they did put up a couple, we knew that we had a lot of fight in us. That's the type of team we are."

Sonny Gray got Oakland's staff back on track, yielding two runs in eight innings after the club had allowed 17 earned runs over the last three contests.

The A's turn to Jesse Hahn (1-1, 2.12 ERA), who missed his originally scheduled start Thursday due to a blister on his right middle finger. He told MLB's official website that he threw all of his pitches in a bullpen Sunday without setbacks.

"This past week or two, it gave me a chance to heal," Hahn said. "If I would have made that last start -- which I wanted to, but it was a smart decision not to -- I would have had a chance of re-opening it and possibly being on the DL for something so small and stupid."

Hahn will be looking for his second straight win after holding Kansas City to three hits over 5 1/3 innings of a 5-0 road victory on April 18. He has never faced the Angels.

Los Angeles' Matt Shoemaker (2-1, 6.46) missed his last start, too, after going on the bereavement list following his grandfather's death.

He gets another shot at the A's after struggling against them in a 6-3 loss on April 20. The right-hander gave up five runs -- four on home runs by Stephen Vogt and Marcus Semien -- over three-plus innings after logging at least six innings in seven of his previous eight outings. The five earned were the second-most he's allowed in his 24 starts. He had thrown 7 1/3 scoreless innings over two previous appearances versus Oakland.

Billy Butler is 1 for 15 in his last four games but 3 for 5 off Hahn.

Angels catcher Chris Iannetta is expected to be back in the lineup after sitting out Wednesday with a cut on one of his fingers.

FROM BLEACHER REPORT

Mike Trout's New Aggressive Approach Is Making Baseball's Best Even Better

By Zachary D. Rymer

There's a new Mike Trout roaming the baseball landscape early in 2015. And so far, he looks suspiciously like the old Mike Trout, who most everyone knew and loved as the game's best player.

That's the takeaway you get when looking at Trout's numbers. In 19 games, the Los Angeles Angels Angels center fielder is slashing .318/.432/.545 with four home runs, five stolen bases and a .978 OPS.

Among the game's elite players, numbers like these place Trout about where you'd expect. On Monday morning, he ranked in the top 10 in the American League in adjusted OPS and behind only three other players in Wins Above Replacement.

Because Trout led everyone in adjusted OPS and WAR between 2012 and 2014, it might be tempting to say his current positions in both categories were inevitable. But if you rack your brain, you'll remember that Trout being his usual self in 2015 wasn't supposed to be a sure thing.

Though Trout captured an overdue MVP award in 2014, it was a down season by his standards. His average fell from the mid-.320s to just .287, and his OPS fell to .939 from .988 the previous season. He went from being "easily" baseball's best player to "arguably" baseball's best player.

After a year like that, it was clear that making an adjustment or two would be in Trout's best interest. And that, naturally, brings us to where this "new" Mike Trout is coming from.

If you already know where we're going, that's either (a) because you can read headlines or (b) because Trout wasn't keeping any secrets in spring training about what he wanted to do in 2015.

In February, Trout told Mike DiGiovanna of the Los Angeles Times that one of his biggest goals for 2015 was cutting down on his strikeouts after leading the AL with 184 of them in 2014. When asked in early March to elaborate on his plan, Trout made a point about being more aggressive.

"Throughout my career, I've been taking," he said. "I like to see pitches, but I'm going to get locked and loaded on the first pitch. If it's in the zone, I'm going to take a hack at it."

In theory, swinging at pitches that are good to hit instead of taking them makes perfect sense. And according to a person in the know, this was the right idea for Trout to pursue.

An advisor to an AL team told this to Anthony Castrovino of Sports on Earth: "The book on Trout is to get a first-pitch strike on him, because he usually takes on first pitches. ... So what I want to know is what happens when he starts swinging at more first pitches. How does that change everything else?"

As far as that last question is concerned, Trout hinted at what he could do with more early swings with his spring performance. He hit .441 with a 1.362 OPS, numbers that, as he told Bob Nightengale of USA Today, had a lot to do with his newfound aggressive approach.

But now we're in the regular season, and we don't need to take his word for it about what's behind his production anymore. We can see for ourselves.

Not surprisingly, what we can see is some pretty good stuff.

Trout is indeed being more aggressive. He's doubled his first-pitch swing rate, going from 10.6 in 2014 to 21.0 this year. And according to FanGraphs, his overall swing rate is at a career-high 41.7 percent.

Now, you'd think that these extra swings would be leading to shorter, easier at-bats. But actually, the opposite has happened. Trout is working on a career-high rate of 4.52 pitches per plate appearance and, according to Baseball Savant, seeing more two-strike pitches than ever before.

But this isn't to say Trout's extra swings have been wasted. It just means we have to go back to something else he said during spring training.

As told to DiGiovanna: "Being aggressive on that first pitch is getting me ready to hit better than just taking."

Or, translated: You can be a better hitter by swinging than you can by taking.

That Trout's strikeout rate has dropped from an ugly 26.1 percent last year to a more reasonable 19.8 percent this year says this new outlook is working for him, and it's no mirage. He has a career-low 5.7 swinging-strike rate, as well as a career-high 36.8 foul-ball percentage.

There's no need to explain the value of a low whiff rate, but don't underestimate the value of a high foul-ball rate. Many believe foul balls are a valuable skill, including former major leaguer Gabe Kapler:

That Trout has improved his whiff and foul-ball rates despite being more aggressive looks good enough on its own. But what can make these two strengths look even better is how they're stemming largely from an area that had previously been a key weakness.

One of the worst-kept secrets in baseball in 2014 was how much Trout was struggling against high fastballs. He saw a lot of them, and Baseball Savant says he hit a career-low .113 against them.

In 2015, Trout is seeing even more high heat. But he's handling it a lot better, as he's 6-for-22 (.273) against the high hard stuff. That's obviously a small sample, but there are good reasons for it. Though Trout has being similarly aggressive against high heat, his whiff and foul rates against it have improved dramatically:

Mike Trout vs. High Fastballs: 2014-2015

Year	High Fastballs	Swing%	Whiff%	Foul%
2014	879	34.1	8.9	15.0
2015	136	33.1	1.5	17.6

Baseball Savant

As such, Trout's aggressiveness hasn't just helped him solve his strikeout problem. It's also helped him take away the best weapon pitchers had against him in 2014. More so than ever before, he's dictating his own at-bats.

And in a big-picture sense, it's not hard to see how this is benefiting him.

Easily the biggest benefit of Trout's new approach is something he hinted was coming: domination within the strike zone.

Given how much he killed pitches in the zone between 2012 and 2014 when he did swing, it was frustrating how infrequent Trout's in-zone swings were. But so far in 2015, he's drastically ramped up his in-zone swing rate (Z-Swing%) and, per Baseball Savant, is crushing in-zone pitches better than before:

Mike Trout vs. In-Zone Pitches: 2012-2015

Year	Z-Swing%	In-Zone AVG	In-Zone SLUG
2012	55.1	.363	.703
2013	55.6	.347	.659
2014	56.4	.320	.666
2015	63.3	.379	.759

FanGraphs and Baseball Savant

Trout's increased aggressiveness and production against in-zone pitches accounts for the bulk of his overall production. Just as important, though, is how this transition doesn't come with the expected downside.

One thing you fear with hitters who are being more aggressive is that they might also be chasing more pitches outside the zone. But this hasn't been the case with Trout. His chase rate (O-Swing%) hasn't increased nearly as much as his zone rate (Zone%) has dropped:

Mike Trout vs. Out-of-Zone Pitches: 2012-2015

Year	O-Swing%	Zone%
2012	26.5	47.4
2013	24.2	43.7
2014	24.5	44.8
2015	28.9	37.4

FanGraphs

When you mix good discipline and a small percentage of pitches in the zone like that, you're going to walk a lot. So it has been with Trout, who's working on a career-best 16.0 BB%.

Add it all up, and what we're seeing in 2015 is Trout at his very best as a hitter.

By becoming more aggressive, Trout has been able to fix things that were ailing him in 2015. And by mashing in the strike zone and still maintaining enough discipline to take his walks, he's enjoying the best of both worlds like never before.

Basically, he's answering the challenge that was issued in 2014. The league sent a message that Trout was going to have to get better if he wanted to remain the best. He's done that, and in the process, Trout has sent a message of his own:

How 'bout something a little harder next time?

FROM FOX SPORTS

Some early season observations that could hold true all year

By Scott Allen

Just about every article on every site you'll read will regurgitate the title of this article in one way or another. If you get sick of it, worry not, for its expiration date will be coming up here in less than a month. But at any rate, I want to take a look at some hard truths we're facing as progress is made through the best season of all, baseball season.

Yeah, it's early but ...The Angels can't score runs – The Angels parted ways with Howie Kendrick and have willingly lost Josh Hamilton. Supposedly, that wasn't going to make a huge difference. Kendrick, solid as he may be, was a .290 hitter with around 30 doubles and 10 homeruns on an annual basis (replaceable) and Josh Hamilton wasn't any more present last year than he is this year. But the Angels had the best offense in the American League last year, so this wasn't *supposed* to be a problem. They'd just need David Freese and the newly acquired Matt Joyce to step up and if they didn't, the Angels would probably still be fine. And there have been some promising indicators.