



Clips

(August 31, 2015)

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Mike Trout nearly hits for cycle in lopsided Angels loss

BY MIKE DIGIOVANNA

There was one bright spot for the Angels on Sunday, and it was not the spherical ball of hot plasma that caused problems for their outfielders, who lost two balls in the sun in the team's 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians.

It was a four-hit game from center fielder Mike Trout, who began the game with a .194 average, one home run and six runs batted in during August, but came within a home run of his second career cycle.

"It's just getting my [front] foot down," Trout said. "The timing was good. I'm not trying to do too much. I was seeing pitches. I put a couple of good swings on the ball. I'm going to keep working and try to carry it into tomorrow."

Trout tripled to center field in the first inning, singled to center in the fourth and doubled to left in the sixth. Needing a home run for the cycle — his first came against Seattle on May 21, 2013 — Trout blooped a run-scoring single to right in the eighth.

Asked whether he tried to hit a home run in his last at-bat, Trout laughed.

"When I do that, I get my foot down late and I get jammed," Trout said. "That's what happened. If I try to kill the ball, I get my mechanics all messed up."

If the Angels are to contend for a playoff spot, they'll need more offense from the entire lineup, but it wouldn't hurt for Trout to regain the stroke that made him one of baseball's best players.

"I've been feeling good at the plate the last couple days," Trout said. "The results aren't there, but that's baseball. You have to stay positive. Once you start thinking negative and trying to change a bunch of things, that's when you get in trouble."

The Angels don't expect David Freese to be the cure-all for their ailing offense — Freese was hitting .240 with 11 home runs and 43 RBIs when he broke his right index finger July 22 — but the third baseman should provide a boost when he is activated Monday or Tuesday.

"Guys like Freese," Manager Mike Scioscia said, "you appreciate them more when they're not there."

In Freese's absence, Conor Gillaspie struggled defensively and was designated for assignment Aug. 18. Taylor Featherston was solid defensively but had a .130 average when he went on the disabled list Aug. 16. Kaleb Cowart has been superb defensively but has looked overmatched at times at the plate.

The Angels also miss second baseman Johnny Giavotella, who was batting .265 when he went on the DL last week because of a medical issue.

His replacements, Grant Green and Ryan Jackson, have combined to hit .120 (three for 25) with 11 strikeouts in nine games, though Green hit a home run Sunday.

"We have some guys filling in who are young, who have played more than you might project," Scioscia said. "We're trying to establish some depth on offense. You take out David and Johnny, you're going to have guys in there who are more of an unknown quantity."

Angels get too much sun in 9-2 loss to Indians

BY MIKE DIGIOVANNA

The stars haven't aligned for the Angels this season, and neither did the sun on Sunday.

The free-falling club found another way to lose when center fielder Mike Trout and right fielder Kole Calhoun lost high fly balls in the sun, both key plays in a 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians in Progressive Field.

Abraham Almonte broke the game open with a fifth-inning grand slam off Jered Weaver, as the Indians completed a three-game sweep and sent the Angels to their 25th loss in 36 games.

The Angels fell to 65-65, the first time they've been at .500 since June 26, when they were 37-37. They remained 6 1/2 games behind Houston in the American League West but fell 3 1/2 games behind Texas for the second wild-card spot.

If the Angels haven't hit rock bottom yet, they're getting very close.

"These guys want to achieve, and they feel it when we're not playing well," Manager Mike Scioscia said.

"But even though this is a tough stretch, we always talk about, 'Hey, the sun is coming up, let's go out there and try to create some momentum.'"

The sun came up after a morning rain on Sunday and stopped the Angels in their tracks.

The Indians took a 1-0 lead in the first when Jason Kipnis and Michael Brantley doubled. Carlos Santana followed with a high fly ball to right-center that Trout lost track of, the ball dropping for an RBI double.

"I saw it the whole way, I was trying to turn a little bit, and it just kept shifting and went right into the sun," Trout said. "I tried to do whatever I could to catch it, but I had no idea where it was."

Trout was wearing sunglasses. "It didn't matter," he said. "When the ball's right in the sun, you can't do anything about it. You feel helpless."

By the fourth inning, the sun shifted and was no longer a problem for Trout. It was a problem for Calhoun.

Brantley hit a one-out single in the fifth and Calhoun, who was also wearing sunglasses, lost Santana's high fly to the warning track, the ball dropping for another double that put runners on second and third.

Lonnie Chisenhall was walked intentionally to load the bases. Giovanny Urshela popped to first for what should have been the third out. But Almonte crushed his third homer of the season to deep right-center for a 6-0 lead.

"The sun was peeking through [the clouds], then it was up there like a heat lamp," Scioscia said. "Those guys are pretty good at getting around balls, getting them out of the sun. They just lost two of them today, and they're obviously big plays."

Santana added a two-run single off Weaver in the sixth for an 8-1 lead, but the game was lost in the fifth, when Weaver said he threw "one too many heaters in," to Almonte, who hit an 80-mph pitch for his homer.

"If you still call it a fastball, I don't know," Weaver said, his frustration with his diminished velocity clearly evident. "Whatever you guys want to call it."

The Angels can take solace in the fact that they've been awful for five weeks and haven't been buried in the playoff race, but with 32 games left, they need to right themselves quickly.

They rank last in the AL in August in average (.218), runs per game (2.9), hitting with runners in scoring position (.183), on-base percentage (.278) and slugging (.342), and their pitchers have a 7.33 earned-run average over the last 10 games.

"It's a double-edged sword," Scioscia said, when asked whether it's difficult to keep players from getting discouraged. "You certainly don't want guys to start to press, but you don't want to just take things in stride. No one takes these last 36 games in stride, for sure."

Up next

Left-hander Hector Santiago (7-8, 3.13 ERA) will oppose Oakland left-hander Felix Doubront (1-1, 3.70) at O.co Coliseum on Monday at 7 p.m. TV: FS West; Radio: 830, 1330.

Here comes the sun ... and there go the Angels in 9-2 loss to Indians

BY BILL SHAIKIN

If the Angels haven't hit rock bottom yet, they're getting very close. They found another way to lose on Sunday, their two best outfielders — Mike Trout and Kole Calhoun — losing fly balls in the sun, both key plays in a 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians at Progressive Field.

Cleveland center fielder Abraham Almonte broke open the game with a fifth-inning grand slam off Jered Weaver, as the Indians completed a three-game sweep and sent the Angels toward their 25th loss in 36 games.

It marked the seventh time this season that the Angels have been swept in a weekend series. They also fell to 65-65, the first time they have been at .500 since June 26, when they were 37-37.

The only bright spot for the Angels — not including the spherical ball of hot plasma that caused them so many problems — was a four-hit game from Trout, who entered with a dismal .194 August average but came within a home run of his second career cycle.

The Indians took a 1-0 lead in the first when Jason Kipnis doubled to right-center and Michael Brantley hit a one-out, run-scoring double to right. Carlos Santana followed with a high fly ball to right-center that Trout lost in the sun, the ball dropping for an RBI double.

Weaver blanked Cleveland on one hit over the next three innings, but Brantley hit a one-out single in the fifth and Calhoun lost Santana's high fly ball to the warning track in the sun, the ball dropping for another double that put runners on second and third.

Lonnie Chisenhall was walked intentionally to load the bases, and for the second straight game, an Angels intentional free pass was followed by a grand slam, this one by Almonte, who crushed a homer well beyond the right-center field wall for a 6-0 lead.

Grant Green hit a solo homer for the Angels in the top of the sixth, but the Indians tacked on two more runs off Weaver in the bottom of the inning, a rally that started with Francisco Lindor's double and Brantley's intentional walk. Both runners advanced on a wild pitch, and Santana smacked a two-run single to right to make it 8-1.

Trout tripled high off the center-field wall in the first, singled to center in the fourth and doubled to left in the sixth. Needing a homer for the cycle, Trout blooped an RBI single to right in the eighth.

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Angels victims of another sweep, this time it ends with a 9-2 loss in Cleveland

BY JEFF FLETCHER

CLEVELAND — As the Angels collective slump deepens, and as their playoff chances fade, the battle becomes a mental one.

In the clubhouse, the challenge is to avoid letting the physical mistakes manifest themselves into feelings that only make the situation worse.

After the Angels' latest debacle, a 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians that completed a sweep on Sunday, Manager Mike Scioscia said it's a delicate balance.

"You certainly don't want guys to start to press, but you don't want to just take things in stride," he said.

"Our staff is doing a great job of keeping in tune with these guys and communicating. No one takes these last 36 games in stride, for sure. These guys want to achieve. They want to play well. They feel it when we're not playing well. Even though this is a tough stretch, we always talk about, 'Hey, the sun is coming up, and let's go out there and try to create some momentum.'"

Coincidentally, Scioscia said this just after a game in which the sun was one of the main factors in what would become the Angels' 25th loss in their past 36 games, as they fell 3 1/2 games behind the Texas Rangers for the second wild-card spot.

Outfielders Mike Trout and Kole Calhoun lost two balls in the sun, leading directly to five Cleveland runs. Trout and Calhoun were both wearing sunglasses.

"It doesn't matter," Trout said. "When the ball's right in the sun, you can't do nothing about it. You feel helpless."

In the first inning, the Indians had scored one run when Carlos Santana hit a fly ball to straightaway center. Trout lost it and a run scored on the play.

"I saw it the whole way, and I was trying to turn a little bit and it just kept shifting and it went right into the sun," Trout said. "I tried to do whatever I could to maybe catch it, but I had no idea where it was."

In the fifth, Santana hit another high drive to right field, and Calhoun couldn't find it. Instead of two outs and a runner at first, the Indians had one out and runners at second and third. The Angels intentionally walked Lonnie Chisenhall to load the bases. Jered Weaver got Giovanni Urshela on a popup that would have been the third out.

Abraham Almonte then blasted a grand slam, giving the Indians a 6-0 lead.

Weaver said the pitch came on a heater, but then he acknowledged that term doesn't necessarily apply to a pitch that's 80 mph.

"If you still call it a fastball," Weaver. "I don't know. Whatever you guys want to call it."

Weaver certainly was not to blame for the balls lost in the sun, but he still gave up seven other hits and two unintentional walks.

"We've just been running into a little bad luck in some situations and I haven't been able to pitch my way out of those situations," Weaver said. "It's frustrating but at the same time it's baseball. I still have to find ways to make outs and get out of situations and I wasn't able to do that."

Lately, not much has gone right for the Angels. Although they could take some solace in Trout's performance – four hits, a homer shy of the cycle – they still managed just two runs. They have scored seven runs in their last five games.

The pitching has been spotty, too. Over the past 10 games, they have a 7.33 ERA.

"We're in a tough spot," Weaver said. "Obviously we haven't been playing the baseball we want to play. We have been struggling a little bit in all aspects. It's frustrating but at the same time we have to know that things can still happen. We've still got to go out there and keep battling."

Angels blasted by Indians, swept as slide continues

BY JEFF FLETCHER

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Final: Sun-burned Angels swept by Indians

BY JEFF FLETCHER

CLEVELAND – Even the elements now seem to be conspiring against the Angels.

Outfielders Mike Trout and Kole Calhoun lost two balls in the sun, contributing directly to five runs in the Angels’ 9-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians on Sunday.

The Angels were swept in the three-game series, dropping to 11-25 over their last 36 games.

Certainly, some of the same factors that had led to most of their recent troubles were present – most notably an offense that was quiet with the exception of Trout’s four-hit, near-cycle – but two of the biggest plays in the game were caused by the sun.

In the first inning, the Indians had scored one run when Carlos Santana hit a fly ball to straightaway center. Trout lost it and a run scored on the play.

In the fifth, Santana hit another high drive to right field, and Calhoun couldn’t find it. Instead of two outs and a runner at first, the Indians had one out and runners at second and third. The Angels intentionally walked Lonnie Chisenhall to load the bases. Jered Weaver got Giovanny Urshela on a popup that would have been the third out.

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Weaver certainly was not to blame for the balls lost in the sun, but he still gave up seven other hits and two unintentional walks.

Offensively, the Angels could at least take some solace in the fact that slumping Trout had a big game. Trout tripled, doubled and had two singles. He came up to the plate in the eighth needing a homer for his second career cycle, but he instead dropped a bloop single into right.

Overall, though, the Angels managed just five runs in the three-game series, and seven runs in their last five games.

Angels Notes: Ready to welcome back David Freese

BY JEFF FLETCHER

CLEVELAND – The Angels are about to get David Freese back, and not a moment too soon.

Freese will meet the Angels on Monday in Oakland. Depending how he feels, he could be activated for that game. He is likely to be activated Tuesday, at latest.

Although far from the only reason for the Angels' slide, Freese's absence is certainly one of the factors for what has happened to the Angels.

Freese broke his right index finger on July 22, which was the last game of the Angels' 17-3 stretch. Since then, they have lost 25 of their last 36 games.

"We certainly appreciate (Freese), but you're going to notice when he's not there," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "Mike (Trout) and Albert (Pujols) get attention for things they do, look at Freese, (Erick) Aybar, (Kole) Calhoun, (Johnny Giavotella), these are guys you appreciate more when they're not there."

The problem has not merely been the loss of the offense that Freese provided, but that the Angels haven't really had a backup capable of even modest production.

Angels third basemen – mostly Conor Gillaspie, Taylor Featherston and Kaleb Cowart -- hit a combined .183 with two homers in 36 games since Freese has been out.

Compounding matters, the Angels have also been without Giavotella for more than a week. Giavotella is on the disabled list with an undisclosed illness. He is eligible to come back on Sept. 5, but the Angels still aren't sure if he'll be ready by then. The illness is not considered serious, so the Angels are expecting Giavotella back.

"We have some guys who are young, who have tried to fill in and play more than you might project them to play," Scioscia said. "We're trying to establish some depth on the offensive side, you take out David and Johnny, you're going to have guys in there who are more of an unknown quantity."

If the Angels activate Freese on Monday, they don't necessarily have to take a position player off the roster to make room for him. A player who is optioned would not be able to come back for another week, so the Angels may not want to lose Cowart -- who could be a defensive replacement for Freese -- for that long. Instead, they could just send out a pitcher and go short in the bullpen for one day, because they'd be able to recall other pitchers on Tuesday.

ALSO

Cory Rasmus, who is on the disabled list because of forearm stiffness, is not likely to be ready when the roster expands on Tuesday. Scioscia said the Angels are going to try to have him pitch at least an inning in the minors first...

Grant Green hit his first homer of the season, a shot to center field in the sixth inning.

Angels' Mike Trout comes a homer shy of the cycle

BY JEFF FLETCHER

CLEVELAND – Mike Trout ought to be hearing fewer questions about his wrist now.

Trout, whose August slump has been blamed by many on a wrist injury despite Trout's assertion that he's fine, busted out with a four-hit game against the Cleveland Indians on Sunday.

He tripled off the top of the center field fence, doubled and singled twice, just missing out on what would have been his second career cycle.

Trout came to the plate in the eighth inning needing a homer. Asked if he was trying to hit it, Trout just smiled and laughed.

"When I try to do that, I get my foot down late and I get jammed," he said. "That's what happens."

Trout ended up with a bloop single to right.

The good news was that, for most of the game, he seemed to be getting his foot down at the right time. While there had been significant skepticism about the condition of his left wrist because the July 26 injury coincided with the start of his slump, Trout has said all along it's just a matter of timing. He said that's been getting better.

"I've been feeling good at the plate the last couple days," Trout said. "Obviously the results aren't there, but that's baseball. You have to stay positive. Once you start thinking negative and trying to change a bunch of things, that's when you get in trouble. Just keep working, and try to carry it into tomorrow."

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

BY JEFF FLETCHER

ANGELS AT A'S

Where: O.co Coliseum

TV: Fox Sports West, 7 p.m.

Did you know: The Angels have won 14 of their past 20 games against the A's.

THE PITCHERS

LHP HECTOR SANTIAGO (7-8, 3.13)

One of the reasons that Santiago's season has been so good – despite a second-half slump – is his ability to limit damage. Santiago has held opponents to a .214 average with runners on base, and .176 with runners in scoring position. Of the 22 homers he's allowed, 16 have been solo homers.

Vs. A's: 3-2, 2.08

At O.Co Coliseum: 1-2, 3.65

Loves to face: None

Hates to face: Josh Reddick, 4 for 12 (.333)

RHP FELIX DOUBRONT (1-1, 3.70)

Doubront, who spent most of his career with the Boston Red Sox, was designated for assignment by the Toronto Blue Jays in July then traded him to the A's. He came out of his last start when he was hit in the foot by a line drive. He has allowed five earned runs in 182/3 innings with the A's. In his past three starts he's allowed opponents to hit .192.

vs. Angels: 1-1, 3.29

At O.co Coliseum: 0-1, 5.16

UPCOMING MATCHUPS

Tuesday: A's RHP Chris Bassitt (1-6, 2.82) vs. Angels RHP Matt Shoemaker (6-9, 4.48), 7 p.m., Fox Sports West

Wednesday: A's RHP Sonny Gray (12-6, 2.13) vs. Angels LHP Andrew Heaney (5-2, 3.11), 12:30, Fox Sports West

FROM ANGELS.COM

Trout notches encouraging 4-for-4 day: Slugger finishes homer shy of cycle with an RBI

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND—Asked if he tried to go deep in Sunday's eighth inning, while needing only a home run for his second career cycle, Mike Trout smiled wide and snickered, offering some rare levity in an otherwise solemn Angels clubhouse.

"When I do that, I get my foot down late and I get jammed," Trout said after a 9-2, sweep-clinching loss to the Indians. "That's what happened."

Instead of a home run, Trout muscled an RBI single into shallow right field. He didn't get the cycle, but he did go 4-for-4, an encouraging performance in the tail end of an uncharacteristically bad month.

Trout entered Sunday with a .627 OPS in August, easily his lowest in a month since his first full season in 2012. Then he hit a triple high off Progressive Field's tall fence in center field, then lined a single up the middle, then laced a double down the left-field line and capped his afternoon with another hit.

It's all about getting his foot down early, the one thing he didn't do in his final plate appearance.

"I've been feeling good at the plate the last couple days," said Trout, now batting .298/.397/.581 with 33 home runs and 74 RBIs. "Obviously the results aren't there, but that's baseball. You have to stay positive. Once you start thinking negative and trying to change a bunch of things, that's when you get in trouble."

Trout also gets in trouble when he tries to hit home runs.

"Once," Trout said when asked if he's ever homered when trying to, "and it was when I hit for the cycle last time [on May 21, 2013]. If I try to kill the ball, I get my mechanics all messed up. It comes along with the last few weeks of trying to do too much. Lately, I've been recognizing pitches. My first couple at-bats, I felt comfortable up there."

Green, Trout provide only offense for Angels

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND -- Abraham Almonte launched a grand slam, Carlos Santana drove in three runs with a little help from the sun and Josh Tomlin spun seven-plus strong innings to lead the Indians to a 9-2 rout over the Angels on Sunday at Progressive Field.

The win was the eighth in the past 10 games for Cleveland (63-66), which still has a pulse in the American League Wild Card race. The Indians are five games back of the second Wild Card spot with four teams, including the Angels (65-65), ahead of them. Los Angeles, which is 6 1/2 games out of first in the AL West and 3 1/2 back of a Wild Card spot, has lost eight of 10 and 25 of its last 36.

The Indians are not paying much mind to the standings just yet.

"You can't look too far ahead," Indians outfielder Michael Brantley said. "If you look too far ahead, you start putting pressure on yourself and not playing good baseball. You've got to take one game for what it is -- good, bad or indifferent -- and the next day you have to do the same thing over and over. Then, once you get towards the end, then you can start looking a little bit. You can peek. Not look. Peek."

Almonte delivered a fifth-inning grand slam off Angels starter Jered Weaver, who was charged with eight runs on nine hits in six innings. That all the runs were deemed earned seemed a bit unfair, considering Santana's two doubles on the day came on balls lost in the sun by Angels outfielders.

The elements did not deter Tomlin, though. The Indians righty limited the Angels to two runs (one on a homer by Grant Green) on six hits, ending with eight strikeouts and no walks. Three of the hits allowed by Tomlin came off the bat of Angels center fielder Mike Trout, who finished a home run shy of his second career cycle.

Trout laughed when asked if he tried to go deep in the eighth, an at-bat that ended in a bloop single to right field.

"When I do that, I get my foot down late and I get jammed," Trout said. "That's what happened."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Escape act: Kole Calhoun led off Sunday's game with a single and Trout followed with a triple, but the Angels did not score a run in the first inning. Tomlin picked off Calhoun prior to Trout's shot off the center-field wall and then proceeded to strike out Albert Pujols before inducing a flyout off the bat of David Murphy.

Silver lining: Trout entered Sunday's game with a .627 OPS in August, his lowest for any month since his first full season in 2012. But the superstar center fielder showed some encouraging signs in the series finale, going 4-for-4 with an RBI. Trout started the game with a triple high off the tall fence in center field, then lined a single up the middle, laced a double down the left-field line and muscled a blooper into shallow right field.

"I've been feeling good at the plate the last couple days," Trout said. "Obviously the results aren't there, but that's baseball. You have to stay positive. Once you start thinking negative and trying to change a bunch of things, that's when you get in trouble."

Carlos Santana: Twice on Sunday, a high fly ball off Santana's bat led to a sun-assisted double for Cleveland's first baseman. Trout lost track of one in center in the first inning, leading to an RBI double for Santana. In the fifth, Calhoun lost sight of one in right field, where it dropped in for another two-base hit. Two batters later, Almonte delivered his grand slam.

"We'll take it," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "But saying that, too, when it happened, Carlos ended up on third and he ended up on second. ... Rather than put your head down and maybe stand at first because you're mad, sometimes when you get a break, you take advantage of it."

Meatball: Weaver looked like he was going to avoid trouble despite putting runners on second and third with one out in the fifth inning, a byproduct of the Santana fly ball that Calhoun lost in the sun. After a rare mound visit by Angels manager Mike Scioscia, Weaver intentionally walked Lonnie Chisenhall, then got Giovanny Urshela to pop out. But to the next batter, Almonte, Weaver grooved a 1-1, 80-mph pitch right down the middle for a grand slam, increasing the Angels' deficit from two to six. Weaver's ERA is now 4.94.

"One too many heaters in," Weaver said. "If you still call it a fastball. I don't know. Whatever you guys want to call it."

QUOTABLE

"It feels great. I've been talking about this for a long time: I feel so comfortable here. I feel free. They let me play. They don't expect too much from me. They tell me to play hard, enjoy, having fun, and I like it."—Almonte, acquired from the Padres on July 31.

"The energy that's been here since I've been back up has been unreal. It's been awesome. From 2 o'clock, when everybody starts arriving, until the game's over with, the energy is there, and that's huge for us. We need to continue that energy." – Tomlin, who was recalled from Triple-A on Aug. 15.

"No one takes these last 36 games in stride, for sure. These guys want to achieve, they want to play well, they feel it when we're not playing well. Even though this is a tough stretch, we always talk about, 'Hey, the sun is coming up, and let's go out there and try to create some momentum.'" – Scioscia, on the state of his struggling team

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Indians hit a grand slam on Saturday (Yan Gomes) and Sunday (Almonte) against the Angels. It marked the first time since Sept. 17-18, 2010, that Cleveland belted a grand slam in consecutive games. Shin-Soo Choo and Matt LaPorta achieved the feat the last time around against Kansas City. The Angels had not allowed a grand slam since July 5 last year against Houston.

The Indians have collected at least 10 hits in 12 consecutive home games, marking the longest such streak at home for any Major League team since 2002, when the Rangers also enjoyed a 12-game run of that type.

The Angels are back at .500 for the first time since June 26, when they were 37-37. Immediately after that, they won 17 of 20 games to vault into first place. And immediately after that, they dropped 25 of 36 to fall out of the playoff picture. With 65 losses, the Angels have already surpassed their total from last year, when they finished a Major League-best 98-64.

WHAT'S NEXT

Angels: Lefty Hector Santiago (7-8, 3.13 ERA) starts Monday's series opener from Oakland, opposite fellow lefty Felix Doubront (1-1, 3.70 ERA). Santiago gave up five runs on seven hits and three walks in 4 1/3 innings against the Tigers on Wednesday and has posted a 5.23 ERA in eight second-half starts, following his first trip to the All-Star Game. First pitch from O.co Coliseum is slated for 7:07 p.m. PT.

Indians: Right-hander Danny Salazar (11-7, 3.30 ERA) is slated to take the ball for the Tribe in the opener of a three-game set in Toronto at 7:07 p.m. ET on Monday night. Salazar missed his last scheduled start due to illness, but he has a 1.99 ERA with 54 strikeouts in 54 1/3 innings over his past eight outings. On Aug. 22 in New York, the righty gave up five runs (four earned) in 4 2/3 innings against the Yankees.

Angels slip to .500, but look to battle back: Despite struggles, club knows 'things can still happen,' Weaver says

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND -- August is almost over, and the Angels are a .500 team. It had been 65 days since they had the same amount of wins as losses, but then they were unable to score in a first inning that began with a single and a triple, and they lost two fly balls in the sun and gave up their second grand slam in as many days in a Sunday afternoon game from Progressive Field.

And now, after their 25th loss in their past 36 games, the Angels are 65-65.

"We're in a tough spot," Jered Weaver said after a 9-2, sweep-clinching loss to the Indians. "Obviously, we haven't been playing the baseball we want to play. We've been struggling a little bit in all aspects. It's frustrating, but at the same time, we have to know that things can still happen. We've still got to go out there and keep battling."

The Angels stomached tough losses on Friday and Saturday on back-to-back bullpen meltdowns, the first by Trevor Gott and the second by Joe Smith. They began Sunday with a line-drive single by leadoff hitter Kole Calhoun, but then he got picked off by Indians starter Josh Tomlin.

Mike Trout followed with a triple high off the tall fence in center field -- part of an encouraging 4-for-4 game at the plate -- but Albert Pujols and David Murphy couldn't bring him in.

Then Mother Nature started to beat up on the Angels.

After an RBI double by Michael Brantley in the first, Carlos Santana lifted a high fly ball to center field that Trout lost at the very end, rewarding the Indians' first baseman with two bases and plating a second run. In the fifth, Calhoun lost sight of another Santana fly ball in front of the right-field warning track to put runners on second and third with one out.

Yes, Trout and Calhoun were both wearing sunglasses.

"It doesn't matter," Trout said. "When the ball's right in the sun, you can't do anything about it. You feel helpless."

Weaver, five days removed from a dugout tirade shortly after Trout and Calhoun miscommunicated on a fly ball in Detroit, slumped his arms and looked on in disbelief.

Three batters later, his 80-mph fastball to Abraham Almonte resulted in a grand slam.

"It could have been a different game, but that's the way it goes," said Weaver, charged with eight runs on nine hits and four walks in six innings, putting him at 6-10 with a 4.94 ERA. "We've just been running into a little bad luck in some situations, and I haven't been able to pitch my way out of those situations."

The last time the Angels had a .500 record, it was June 26. Immediately after that, they won 17 of 20 to vault into first place, up two games on the Astros in the American League West. Now they trail the

Astros by 6 1/2 games in the division and are 3 1/2 back of the Rangers for the second Wild Card spot, with the Twins also in front. Their pitching staff has a 7.33 ERA over its past 10 games, their offense has been baseball's worst this month -- at least according to batting average, on-base percentage, slugging and runs per game -- and their defense has abandoned them, too.

"We have to stay positive," Trout said, "and try to get through this."

The Angels will play 25 of their last 32 against AL West opponents, and they still have an entire month to get right again.

"No one takes these last 36 games in stride, for sure," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "These guys want to achieve, they want to play well; they feel it when we're not playing well. Even though this is a tough stretch, we always talk about, 'Hey, the sun is coming up, and let's go out there and try to create some momentum.'"

Santiago looks to get Angels back on track

BY ALEJANDRO ZÚÑIGA / MLB.COM

Hector Santiago starts against fellow lefty Felix Doubront in the opener of a three-game series between the Angels and A's from O.co Coliseum on Monday, with first pitch set for 7:07 p.m. PT.

Santiago (7-8, 3.13 ERA) gave up five runs on seven hits and three walks in 4 1/3 innings against the Tigers on Wednesday, a night that saw Justin Verlander come three outs away from a no-hitter, and he hasn't really been the same in the second half. Since making the All-Star team, the Angels' southpaw has a 5.23 ERA over an eight-start stretch.

Doubront -- purchased from the Blue Jays on July 31 -- has a 2.41 ERA since joining the A's, giving up six runs (five earned) on 15 hits and seven walks in 18 2/3 innings, striking out 17. The 27-year-old has a 3.29 ERA in 13 2/3 career innings against the Angels, who have statistically the worst offense in the American League this month.

The Angels have lost 25 of their past 36 games overall and 16 of their past 19 on the road, falling 6 1/2 games back of the Astros in the AL West and 3 1/2 back of the Rangers for the second Wild Card spot. Things to know about this game

Monday's series opener begins a heavy stretch of inter-division matchups for both teams. The Angels finish the season with 25 of 32 games against the AL West. The A's have 24 of 31 against the AL West.

David Freese, out since July 23 with a fractured right index finger, could be activated off the disabled list on Monday, after starting three straight games at third base for Triple-A Salt Lake. Kaleb Cowart has been filling in lately.

The Angels have won five of their past seven games against the A's and lead the season series, 7-5. The Angels have won 14 of their past 20 overall against the A's, who field a completely different team from the last time the two clubs faced off on June 21.

Freese's return could deepen Angels' lineup: Third baseman has been out with fractured finger, could help produce from bottom of order

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND -- David Freese, out with a fractured right index finger since July 23, was expected to start his third straight game at third base for Triple-A Salt Lake on Sunday, then be activated for Monday's series opener against the A's if all goes well.

He can't come soon enough.

Without Freese and second baseman Johnny Giavotella, the Angels -- last in the American League in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging and runs per game this month -- have received little to no production from the bottom third of their batting order.

Since Giavotella was placed on the disabled list with an undisclosed illness on Tuesday, the Nos. 7-9 hitters in the Angels' lineup -- mostly Kaleb Cowart, Carlos Perez and Grant Green -- have combined for just eight hits in 51 at-bats.

"We have some guys who are young, who have tried to fill in and play more than you might project them to play," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "We're trying to establish some depth on the offensive side. You take out David and Johnny, you're going to have guys in there who are more of an unknown quantity."

Health-information privacy rules prevent the Angels from disclosing specifics on the illness that is keeping Giavotella out, and Scioscia opted against providing an update on his progress before Sunday's game. Giavotella is eligible to be activated on Saturday, but there is still no indication whether that will be the case, and he won't join the team in Oakland.

At least Freese -- with a .240/.309/.397 slash line this season -- will be back either Monday or Tuesday, when rosters expand. Scioscia called him "one of those guys you appreciate more when they're not there," and that's certainly the case lately.

Homers not enough as Angels fall to Tribe

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ AND JORDAN BASTIAN / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND -- One night after coming from behind with three runs against seventh-inning reliever Trevor Gott, the Indians went off against Angels setup man Joe Smith in the eighth, getting a go-ahead double by Carlos Santana and a game-breaking grand slam by Yan Gomes to capture an 8-3 win from Progressive Field on Saturday.

Gomes knew the ball was leaving the ballpark right off the bat.

"Oh man, I sure hoped I did," Gomes said with a laugh, "because I was really excited about it. I hit it pretty good, but then when you see [Mike] Trout turning and burning you're like, 'OK, maybe I should start running a little bit.' But yeah, I knew I got it."

The Indians won their fourth straight game and their seventh in their last nine while the Angels continued to nosedive. They've dropped 23 of their last 35 overall and 15 of their last 18 on the road, falling 6 1/2 games back of the Astros in the American League West and 2 1/2 back of the Rangers for the second Wild Card spot.

Smith, an integral part of the Indians' bullpen from 2009-13, took over a 3-3 game in the eighth inning and promptly gave up line-drive singles to Francisco Lindor and Michael Brantley. Santana followed with an RBI double down the right-field line and Smith elected to intentionally walk Lonnie Chisenhall with first base open.

On Smith's next pitch, an 88-mph fastball out over the plate, Gomes brought everyone in with a towering shot into the bushes in center field, igniting an announced crowd of 22,843 and keeping Cleveland's hopes of October baseball alive.

The Indians (62-66) are still five games back of the final playoff spot, with five teams to jump.

"Trying to throw sinker in, missed middle-middle," Smith said of his pitch to Gomes, which resulted in the first home run he had allowed to a right-handed hitter all season. "That's what happens, you know? If you don't throw the ball where you want to, the guy with the bat is going to do some damage."

Saturday's game included a 38-minute rain delay in the bottom of the third.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

First-pitch hunting: Corey Kluber's first pitch of the night was a 91-mph fastball, which Kole Calhoun sent to deep right field for a leadoff home run to give the Angels a quick lead. In the fourth, Kluber began the inning with a 90-mph heater that former Indians outfielder David Murphy sent to straightaway center for another leadoff shot. On the year, five of the 19 homers yielded by Kluber have come on the first pitch. Kluber took a no-decision after giving up three runs in six innings, and ended with six strikeouts and three walks.

"I don't think that it was my best outing tonight," Kluber said. "But I found a way to kind of battle through it and keep the team in it and give the team a chance to win. And, ultimately, the offense pulled through with a big inning."

Trout stays cold, offense follows: Mike Trout went 0-for-3 with a walk and is now batting .194 in August, making this his least productive month since his first full season in 2012. With Trout struggling, the Angels are last in the AL in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging and runs per game in August.

Prior to the game, Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Trout's slump is not a result of the wrist injury he suffered in late July.

"To be honest with you, if Mike was doing his normal stuff, it still might not be enough right now," Scioscia said postgame. "We've got to get our lineup deep. Not one guy is going to carry us, even if he's

locked in. We need to re-establish our depth in the lineup. Some of that will happen when get guys healthy again, and that's what we're looking forward to. [David] Freese is hopefully right around the corner."

Lonnie stays hot: After the rain delay in the bottom of the third, Brantley led off with a single to set up an eventual two-on, two-out situation for Chisenhall. Cleveland's right fielder sliced a pitch into left for a two-run single to give the Tribe a temporary 3-1 lead. Since being recalled from Triple-A on July 30,

Richards recovers: Garrett Richards gave up three runs on six hits in the first three innings, requiring 63 pitches to record only nine outs. Then, he turned it on. Relying heavily on his curveball and slider, the hard-throwing 27-year-old right-hander allowed just one baserunner over the next four frames, striking out six of the 13 batters he faced. Richards took the mound for the seventh with 103 pitches, then needed only 14 more to record a 1-2-3 inning, which finished with a strikeout of All-Star second baseman Jason Kipnis.

"I just continue to be aggressive," Richards said. "I started mixing in some nice breaking balls there, trying to keep guys off balance. I was just trying to battle, trying to give us a chance to win, trying to keep us in the game."

QUOTABLE

"That was a really good at-bat. Frankie's only faced [Smith] I think once, but you could tell he spread out and he stayed real short and fouled off some tough pitches. That was really big. The whole inning -- Brantley, Santana -- they got the ball up and did something with it. But Frankie's at-bat was really big. And then it led to Gomer." -- Indians manager Terry Francona, on Lindor's eight-pitch leadoff at-bat in the eighth

"We're playing with more energy. I'm not sure what the reason for it is, but I think that it's kind of eye-opening when you go out there. It shows us that that's the way we need to play every day. It's not just, 'Show up and be ready to go.' It's, 'Come out there with energy from the first pitch.'" -- Kluber

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Prior to Calhoun's first-inning, first-pitch homer off Kluber on Saturday, the last Angels batter to have a first-pitch blast to lead off a game was Maicer Izturis on June 7, 2008, on the road against Oakland.

The last Indians pitcher to give up a first-pitch, game-opening homer was also Kluber on Sept. 11, 2013 (Kansas City's Alex Gordon). Murphy's shot made him the first player to homer for the Indians and against the Indians in the same season since Russell Branyan in 2010.

WHAT'S NEXT

Angels: Jered Weaver (6-9, 4.59 ERA) takes the ball for Sunday's 10:10 a.m. PT series finale in hopes of getting back on track, after being charged with six runs on seven hits in 5 2/3 innings against the Tigers on Tuesday. The 33-year-old right-hander was hurt by a fly ball that fell between Mike Trout and Kole Calhoun that night and had been sharp since returning from the disabled list, posting a 2.08 ERA in three prior starts.

Indians: Right-hander Josh Tomlin (2-1, 3.26 ERA) is scheduled to start for the Tribe in the finale of this three-game set with the Angels at 1:10 p.m. ET on Sunday at Progressive Field. All seven runs allowed by Tomlin since rejoining the Indians' rotation have come via home runs. In his three starts back with Cleveland, the righty has 18 strikeouts against two walks in 19 1/3 innings.

Angels, Smith look to work through rough stretch: Right-hander allows grand slam in eighth against Indians

BY ALDEN GONZALEZ / MLB.COM

CLEVELAND -- Joe Smith hadn't given up a home run to a right-handed hitter all season, until Indians catcher Yan Gomes sent one into Progressive Field's bushes Saturday night.

In a career that dates back to 2007, Smith had never allowed five runs in one outing, until Saturday's eighth inning, when the Angels' setup man turned a tied game into an 8-3 deficit and yet another crushing loss.

"Tough night for Joe," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "He's been there for us all year, and he'll be a big part of what we hope to accomplish the rest of the way. We'll turn the page on this."

Facing his former team, and coming in after Garrett Richards retired 13 of his final 14 batters, Smith was hit around like never before. Francisco Lindor began with a line-drive single to cap an eight-pitch at-bat, and then the Indians exploded for five runs on eight pitches, four of which were part of an intentional walk.

Michael Brantley singled on a first-pitch sinker, Carlos Santana lined the go-ahead double on an 0-1 sinker, and Gomes, batting after an intentional walk to Lonnie Chisenhall, pummeled a first-pitch fastball to straightaway center field to clear the bases.

It was the first grand slam Smith had given up since his rookie season eight years ago and his first home run against a right-handed hitter since then-Red Sox outfielder Yoenis Cespedes on Aug. 10, 2014.

"Pretty surprised," Smith said.

"I've had some tough at-bats against him," said Gomes, who caught Smith while both were on the Indians in 2013. "I just wanted to get on the first good pitch I saw."

Smith's rough outing came 24 hours after Trevor Gott -- with a 1.65 ERA at the time -- blew a one-run lead by allowing three runs in Friday's seventh inning.

The Angels can't do much right these days.

Mike Trout is finishing up his worst month since his first full season in 2012, the bottom third of the lineup isn't producing -- a byproduct of David Freese and Johnny Giavotella both being on the disabled list -- and the Angels are at the bottom in almost every statistical category in August, including batting average, on-base percentage, slugging and runs per game.

Then there's the starting rotation, which carried the Angels for the first three months but has a collective 5.17 ERA over the last 35 games.

And then there's the back end of the bullpen, solid all year but coming off back-to-back meltdowns.

The Angels, thusly, are slipping. They've lost 23 of their last 35 overall and 15 of their last 18 on the road, falling 6 1/2 games back of the Astros in the American League West and 2 1/2 back of the Rangers for the second Wild Card spot.

"Win," Richards said when asked how his team can get back on track. "That's all it comes down to is just winning. I don't think anyone in here is concerned about their numbers or anything like that. People are going out there trying to put together good at-bats, trying to put up zeroes when they're called upon as far as pitching goes, and we're just trying to put together games right now. We're just trying to come out with wins at the end. I don't think anybody cares about anything else."

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sun spots: Trout, Angels swept in Cleveland with 9-2 loss

CLEVELAND (AP) -- Mike Trout and the Los Angeles Angels have a more pressing concern than the AL wild-card race: They need to win their next game to avoid falling below .500.

Abraham Almonte hit his first career grand slam and Josh Tomlin pitched into the eighth inning, leading the Cleveland Indians past the slumping Angels 9-2 Sunday for their fifth straight victory.

Trout and Kole Calhoun both lost catchable fly balls in the sun, and the Indians' offense made them pay. Cleveland capped a three-game sweep and dropped the Angels (65-65) back to .500 for the first time since June 26.

Los Angeles, which has lost eight of 10 overall and 16 of 19 on the road, is 3 1/2 games behind Texas in the race for the second AL wild card.

"We are where we are. We're not going to look back," manager Mike Scioscia said. "We need to re-establish some things on the field that we've done at times well this year."

Jered Weaver (6-10) gave up eight runs and nine hits in six innings. He was hurt by those two costly miscues that led to five Cleveland runs.

"Talking to the guys, (the sun) was peeking through and then it was up there like a heat lamp," Scioscia said. "But those guys are pretty good at getting around balls. They just lost two of them today."

Cleveland had a 2-0 lead when Michael Brantley singled with one out in the fifth. Carlos Santana lifted what appeared to be a routine fly to right, but Calhoun lost sight of it. The ball fell for a double and Brantley went to third.

Scioscia went to the mound to talk strategy. Lonnie Chisenhall was intentionally walked before Almonte sent his slam to right-center.

"One too many heaters in - or if you still call it a fastball, I don't know," Weaver said. "Whatever you guys want to call it."

Brantley's RBI double gave Cleveland the lead in the first. Brantley scored when Trout lost Santana's fly ball near the warning track.

"It could have been a different game, but that's the way it goes," Weaver said. "Just been running into a little bad luck in some situations and haven't been able to pitch my way out of those situations."

Outfield miscues are becoming a trend when Weaver pitches. In his previous start against the Tigers, an 8-7 win, Weaver endured a four-run third inning. Trout lost a ball in the lights that dropped for a double.

At the end of that inning, Weaver was seen yelling angrily in the dugout, but later denied shouting at Trout or anyone in particular.

Tomlin (3-1) was charged with two runs in seven-plus innings. The right-hander was making his fourth start since coming off the disabled list Aug. 15 after having shoulder surgery in March.

Grant Green homered for the Angels in the sixth, his first of the season.

Trout broke out of his slump at the plate by going 4 for 4 with an RBI. He entered the game hitting .194 (18 for 93) in August, and he hasn't homered in 22 games.

SNAP OUT OF IT

On July 26, the Angels held a one-game lead in the AL West. Since then, Los Angeles has been in a tailspin - due in large part to a sputtering offense.

"On the offensive side, there's no doubt that (the slump has) been prolonged," Scioscia said. "There's always tools you try to use to get out of it. We've tried no BP, extra BP, we've tried, 'Hey, let's just go American Legion and come out here and get loose and play.' As of right now, we're still searching for that offensive chemistry."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels 3B David Freese (broken right finger), on a minor league rehab assignment at Triple-A Salt Lake, will likely be activated when rosters expand Tuesday.

UP NEXT

Angels LHP Hector Santiago (7-8) starts Monday in the opener of a three-game series at Oakland. He is 2-0 with a 1.29 ERA against the Athletics since the beginning of last season.