



Clips

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FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

Angels' Mike Trout is starting to put his foot down

Pedro Moura

Mike Trout started the season without a hit in eight at-bats and then without an extra-base hit in 20 plate appearances. The home run the Angels center fielder launched Monday night at the Oakland Coliseum showed him he has risen out of an early slump.

"I feel, obviously, better at the plate," Trout said. "Where I get in trouble is when I don't get that foot down. The last couple games, it's been coming back."

Trout pointed to how many foul balls he has hit as evidence of poor timing. That is his typical barometer of how he's feeling.

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"And when you're taking pitches and you're not late seeing them through the zone," he said. "And getting your foot down early. If you don't get your foot down, your head's moving, so, yeah: It's gonna be tough to hit."

But, above all else: The more balls he's fouling off, the worse he's hitting, he believes. And, indeed, statistics confirm the intuition. Trout fouled off 25 pitches through his first 30 plate appearances — 32% of all the strikes he saw. His career average is less than 26% of the strikes he sees.

Despite the struggles, Trout entered Tuesday's game with a .736 OPS, above the major league average, in part because he has five walks.

Short hops

First baseman C.J. Cron was out of the Angels' starting lineup for the second time in five games Tuesday. The 26-year-old has only two hits in 26 at-bats this season. "We need him," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "You saw in the second half, when he came back up, how important he was to us. Right now, he's just not where he will be." ...Left-hander Tyler Skaggs will throw four innings for triple-A Salt Lake on Friday in his second regular season start on his way back from Tommy John surgery. Skaggs will then throw five innings twice for Salt Lake, according to Angels pitching coach Charles Nagy. With a six-inning start likely to follow, Skaggs is now unlikely to return to the majors until May. ...The Angels won't skip Nick Tropeano in the rotation after he started Monday. They could have, because of an off day Thursday.

Angels beat Athletics, 5-4, with ninth-inning blast from Geovany Soto

By Pedro Moura

t made for a weird, cosmic sort of revenge, where most of the parties involved missed it.

Down to their last strike of Tuesday's eighth inning, against the man once signed to be their closer, the Angels rallied and propelled themselves toward an improbable win at the Oakland Coliseum.

Albert Pujols powered a two-out, two-strike double against Athletics setup man Ryan Madson, turning a 4-1 deficit into a one-run game the Angels went on to win, 5-4, in the ninth.

"That was the turning right point right there," Geovany Soto said after the Angels' third consecutive victory. "It kept us within a cough to make something happen."

Soto, the Angels backup catcher, provided the cough in the ninth inning, when Oakland closer Sean Doolittle threw him a fastball down the middle and he unloaded for a two-run home run.

"It ended up in kind of like a buffer zone, thigh high," Doolittle said. "The way my fastball tends to ride, it's weird, I tend to get in trouble when the ball's down."

Madson never pitched for the Angels. He spent the 2013 season trying and failing to find his way back from Tommy John surgery. But he helped them out on this night.

Hector Santiago threw four consecutive balls to Billy Burns to start the game and then did not issue a walk to the subsequent 30 batters he faced. The one cost him, though: Burns stole second, moved to third on a Josh Phegley fly ball, and scored when Josh Reddick singled through the middle.

Most of Santiago's missteps thereafter were confined to one Oakland batter, shortstop Marcus Semien. Twice, Santiago battled Semien to a 2-2 count, and twice he threw pitches over the middle-in part of the plate.

Both times, Semien launched them for home runs, first in the third inning and then again in the seventh. After the first homer, Santiago allowed another Burns single, steal and score.

But a seven-pitch fourth inning refueled the 28-year-old left-hander, and he lasted into the eighth, his 72/3 innings more than he had thrown in 57 starts as an Angel. He established his slider early on and then ceased throwing it altogether from the fourth inning on, confusing the Athletics with his changeup.

“It was a matter of getting them looking for something, and then going away from it,” Santiago said.

Mike Morin (1-0) faced one batter in relief, whom he struck out, before Scioscia handed the ball to closer Huston Street for the save, his third. It was Street's third consecutive day pitching; he almost assuredly will be unavailable Wednesday afternoon.

The Angels scored only once against sinkerballing starter Kendall Graveman. In the second, Pujols walked, Kole Calhoun singled, and Pujols alertly took third. The Angels added another walk and another single later in the inning, but, in between, Andrelton Simmons grounded into a double play, which brought in Pujols but hurt the overall cause.

They summoned sporadic baserunners, including in the seventh inning, when Simmons singled and took off running on a hit-and-run play. Soto lined a ball hard to right field, but Reddick caught it and threw back to first base, doubling up Simmons, who was halfway between second and third by then, thinking that it had dropped.

Simmons settled his debt in the ninth, when he ranged deep into foul territory, perhaps 100 feet from where he started, and slid to secure a foul popup from Coco Crisp for the first out. Street looked his way from the mound, nodded, and raved about it later.

Pujols' double allowed him to pass Reggie Jackson in baseball's all-time RBI standings. The 36-year-old has now driven in 1,703 runs, 23rd in the sport's history.

FROM THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Geovany Soto's ninth-inning homer lifts Angels to character-building comeback victory

By JEFF FLETCHER / STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND – Ironically, Huston Street knew the Angels would be good when they lost four of their first five games.

It wasn't so much how they played. It was how they handled themselves.

And now, after Geovany Soto's ninth-inning two-run homer lifted them to a 5-4 come-from-behind victory over the Oakland A's on Tuesday, Street feels even better about the character of his teammates.

“I was very impressed with this team when we started the season 1-4,” Street said. “Very easily you could start to feel little schisms or a slight air of excuse. ... I didn’t hear any of that. Didn’t see anybody drop their heads. Whatever, we’ll get ’em tomorrow. Tonight’s game was kind of a micro-example of who we are as a team and who we will continue to be throughout the season.”

The Angels trailed in this game, too, struggling to piece together any offense against A’s No. 4 starter Kendall Graveman. Starter Hector Santiago was mostly good, but he made a couple mistakes that No. 9 hitter Marcus Semien hit for solo homers.

It added up to a 4-1 deficit in the eighth inning, just four outs away from a loss.

Albert Pujols struck the first big blow of the comeback, fouling off a pair of 0-2 pitches from Ryan Madson before getting one that he could yank into the left-field corner for a double, driving in two.

Suddenly, the Angels were back in the game, down by a run.

Still, they had to contend with Oakland’s lefty closer, Sean Doolittle, and his 95 mph fastballs. And the bottom of the Angels order was due in the ninth.

Andrelton Simmons hit a flyout. Next up was pinch-hitting C.J. Cron, who had not been in the lineup because of a 2-for-26 start to his season. Cron worked Doolittle for a walk.

That brought up Soto, the Angels backup catcher who had been signed mostly because of his defense. And offense is even tougher to come by when playing sporadically.

Soto handles that by facing a pitching machine, set about 50 feet away, every other day or so. Soto estimates that is the equivalent of seeing a 95 mph fastball.

When Doolittle threw him a 93 mph fastball over the middle of the plate, Soto hammered it over the fence in left-center, putting the Angels on top.

If each new player on a team needs to have a “moment,” before he can be firmly established with his new teammates, Soto had his.

A few minutes later, Simmons added his. With closer Huston Street on the mound, the two-time Gold Glove shortstop ran more than 100 feet into foul territory to make a sliding grab of a Khris Davis pop-up.

Two quick outs later, the Angels had a three-game winning streak, and were back to .500, at 4-4.

“That’s huge,” Santiago said. “That just shows that we can battle. We are never giving up. That shows great character. To get four runs in the last two innings and steal a win. That’s huge.”

Joe Smith beats Steph Curry in game of 'P-I-G' as Angels take in Warriors workout

By JEFF FLETCHER / STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND – As a relief pitcher, Joe Smith joked that he’s usually only on the highlights for doing something bad, like giving up a homer.

Except on Tuesday he was all over national TV for doing something good.

And it wasn’t even baseball.

Smith beat NBA star Steph Curry in a game of P-I-G when four Angels players visited the Golden State Warriors practice.

Just before that, Mike Trout had won a game against the Warriors’ Draymond Green.

“I was hoping they had as much fun as we did,” Smith said. “We had a blast.”

Albert Pujols, Cliff Pennington, Trout and Smith spent the morning watching the Warriors practice on the eve of their attempt at history. On Wednesday, in the Warriors' regular-season finale, they will be going for an NBA record 73rd victory.

For most of the time the Angels were in the gym, they sat in folding chairs snapping pictures and taking videos of the defending NBA champions. Once the practice finished, Curry and a few other players came over and chatted with the players. The Angels presented Curry with an Angels jersey with his name and No. 30.

Then, when the court was empty except for a few stray basketballs, the Angels players started shooting. Trout even dunked once. Green joined them for a game of P-I-G, which Trout won.

By the time they played again, this time with Curry, dozens of media members were shooting video.

Smith used a couple trick shots to knock out Curry. He made an over-the-shoulder free throw and then a left-handed three-pointer from the top of the key.

"He's got all those tricks," said Trout, who conceded that Smith is a better basketball player than he is.

Smith, who played basketball through high school, is married to Allie LaForce, a former college basketball player who is now a TV reporter.

"That's where I came up with these trick shots, to beat my wife," Smith said. "She doesn't miss."

Smith also said his only chance to win was because he shot before Curry, which didn't allow Curry to put the pressure on him.

"If he gets to go first am I going to win? No," Smith said. "The dude made 90 of 100 (three-pointers). What are you gonna do? He's the best in the world."

Curry said he also enjoyed meeting the Angels.

"I've watched Albert Pujols for years and never met him before," Curry said, "so that's pretty cool and obviously Mike Trout and the rest of the teammates, talented guys in their trade, so it's pretty cool that they'd come out and watch us and get to chop it up for a little bit."

Pitching like a reliever has helped make Angels' Hector Santiago a more efficient starter

By JEFF FLETCHER / STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND – Maybe Hector Santiago has figured out this whole "starting pitcher" thing.

All he had to do was go back to pitching like a reliever.

Santiago can throw five pitches, a fastball, curveball, slider, changeup and a screwball. But what he seems to have learned is that maybe he shouldn't.

"It's just a matter of being smart enough to start eliminating pitches after you show them," Santiago said Tuesday night.

Santiago had just lasted 72/3 innings, his longest outing with the Angels, in a game in which he essentially stopped throwing breaking balls after the first few innings.

All he threw were fastballs and changeups. And in one inning, all he threw were changeups. He needed only seven of them to get three quick outs in the fourth.

“Just straight-up attack,” Santiago said. “One pitch at a time. One at-bat at a time. One inning at a time. Just try to get through each inning as fast as you can.”

Like a reliever.

Santiago pitched out of the bullpen when he came to the big leagues with the Chicago White Sox. The Angels saw his value as a starter and he’s been in the rotation ever since. One of his issues, though, has been pitch efficiency. Santiago has walked too many hitters and worked too many deep counts, so he couldn’t get deep into games.

On Tuesday, he got two outs into the eighth inning on 108 pitches. He still gave up four runs, but two of them were the product of well-placed singles and timely stolen bases.

“That changeup was really good,” catcher Geovany Soto said. “That kept him within himself. It kept him in the game with less pitches. It really saved a lot of pitches.”

FROM ANGELS.COM

Angels drop Warriors? When PIGs fly

Four Halos visit NBA champs' practice to hoop it up

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Mike Trout started off missing everything left, but then suddenly the superstar center fielder got hot. He nailed a shot from the corner, then two in a row from about 26 feet away. And Draymond Green -- NBA champion, integral member of arguably the greatest basketball team ever assembled -- lost the impromptu game of P-I-G, a shorter version of H-O-R-S-E.

Steph Curry wasn't having it.

The Angels were merely here to spectate, to observe, to shake hands, to take pictures, maybe even acquire some autographs. Not to beat up on Curry's Golden State Warriors teammates. So he challenged them to another game, hitting a shot from the elbow and another one slightly behind the basket and another one basically from half-court.

Trout was knocked out first, then Albert Pujols and then Cliff Pennington. But Joe Smith, the sidearm reliever with a wife, Allie LaForce, who played collegiate basketball, managed to get two letters on Curry, one of them with a reverse bank shot from the free-throw line.

He grabbed the ball and stationed himself behind the three-point line.

"Left hand," Smith called out, then he drained the shot.

Curry tried the same, but it rimmed out, and the four Angels players threw up their hands and celebrated at center court.

Smith then held a press conference.

"We knew somebody had to beat him," Smith said, playfully, in front of a handful of cameras and about a dozen reporters. "We couldn't walk out of here without a win. That's not making ESPN."

For most of late Tuesday morning, the four Angels players sat courtside at the end of the Warriors' practice facility, watching them wind down their workouts the day before taking a shot at history. If the Warriors beat the Memphis Grizzlies on Wednesday night, they'll finish the 2015-16 season 73-9, besting the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls team that finished 72-10.

"It's must-watch TV now in the NBA when [Curry] plays, and obviously when the Warriors play," Trout said of the reigning NBA champs. "... You go for records, you go for rings, and you set your goals high. Obviously they set their goals real high."

Trout is a loyal fan of the Sixers -- a revelation that prompted a collective moan from the media that encircled him -- and was actually a pretty good basketball player at Millville High School. His game "is not there anymore," Trout said, moments before throwing down a one-handed dunk with slacks and a button-down shirt.

After losing to Trout -- small sample size, of course -- Green admitted that he's "not very good at shooting games."

"I can shoot in the games," Green said, "but I'm not good at shooting games. It's cool, though. It's fun."

Smith, meanwhile, downplayed the significance of his own victory.

"He wasn't even trying," Smith said of Curry, who played after going through an entire practice with his team and then putting up 100 shots of his own, making 90 of them.

The Angels watched Curry shoot on one end of the floor and Klay Thompson, Curry's back-court partner and one of the game's most lethal three-point shooters, bury shot after shot directly in front of them.

"Incredible," Trout said. "They weren't missing."

Thompson, whose brother, [Trayce Thompson](#), is an outfielder for the Dodgers, came by and greeted the Angels after his shooting exhibition.

Curry came next, and the Angels presented him with his own No. 30 jersey. Trout, Pujols and Curry have combined to make 17 All-Star Game appearances and have collective five Most Valuable Player Awards.

"I've watched Albert Pujols for years and never met him before," Curry said, "so that's pretty cool. And obviously Mike Trout and the rest of the teammates, talented guys in their trade, so it's pretty cool that they'd come out and watch us practice and get to chop it up for a little bit."

Soto's heroics send Angels to win over A's

By Alden Gonzalez and Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Catcher [Geovany Soto](#) delivered a go-ahead, two-run homer with one out in the ninth inning off A's closer [Sean Doolittle](#) to give the Angels their third straight win, a 5-4 series-clinching victory at the Coliseum on Tuesday night.

Soto's [first home run of the season](#), a blast to left-center field following a one-out walk to [C.J. Cron](#), overshadowed a two-homer day from [Marcus Semien](#). The A's shortstop tagged Angels

starter Hector Santiago for a homer to left to lead off the third, then again with two outs in the seventh for his second career multi-homer day.

"It's great to have helped the team win," Soto said. "But it's mainly a team effort."

Santiago was on the hook for four runs in 7 2/3 innings, while A's starter Kendall Graveman limited the Angels to one run and four hits. A's reliever Ryan Madson was responsible for two runs, snapping a 15-inning regular-season scoreless streak dating back to last year, when he surrendered a two-out, two-run double to Albert Pujols in the eighth ahead of Doolittle's blown save, his first of the year.

"They had some pretty good hitters get some good at-bats off 'em," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Both guys looked good out there. Albert hit a changeup. Soto probably hit a fastball that was down maybe a little but more than we see Sean pitching up. The bullpen's been great. You gotta give them credit, too."

Angels closer Huston Street called Tuesday's win "a micro-example of who we are as a team, and who we will continue to be throughout the season."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Move over, Reggie: Pujols made it a one-run game in the eighth inning, turning on a two-out, two-strike changeup for Madson and lacing a two-run double down the left-field line. The hit snapped Madson's streak of 15 regular-season innings without allowing a run and gave Pujols 1,703 RBIs for his career, passing Reggie Jackson (1,702) for 23rd on all the all-time list.

"I just missed my pitch. It was a changeup, it got in, jammed him a little bit, but it was up enough so he could handle it," Madson said. "I knew that was kind of a safe pitch, wanted him to swing over the top of it, but it was up enough for him to get it in there."

Speed Burns: After sitting three straight days, outfielder Billy Burns returned to the starting lineup and made the most of his opportunity, providing a spark from the leadoff spot by reaching base in each of his first three plate appearances via a walk and two hits. In the first, he stole second and, after advancing to third on Josh Phegley's fly ball to right field, scored the game's first run on Reddick's RBI single. His hustle paid off again in the third, when he singled, advanced to second on a groundout, stole third base and promptly scored on Reddick's groundball out to first.

"That's what he does, he creates some havoc out there," Melvin said. "Gets on base three times, steals a couple bases."

Double dinger: Semien had just two hits in his previous 15 at-bats when he stepped to the plate in the third inning for the first time Tuesday night and belted a 2-2 fastball offering from Santiago into the left-field stands. His homer-happy ways from the No. 9 hole continued in the seventh, as he improved to 6-for-16 (.375) at home this season. The shortstop, who is on pace for 54 home runs this season, totaled 15 last year.

"I've faced [Santiago] a lot," Semien said. "It seems like every time we play them we've faced him, and he's shown me his whole arsenal. I got him on a cutter. He threw me a lot of changeups the one at-bat I got out, then I was able to get him on the changeup the next time."

"It felt great tonight. I just want to keep consistent with barreling up the baseball, not necessarily trying to hit home runs, but if it happens, it happens."

Running a long way: Andrelton Simmons, widely regarded the best defensive shortstop in the game, sprinted more than 100 feet to make a sliding catch on Coco Crisp's foul pop-up to start the ninth inning. Statcast™ had Simmons covering 114.6 feet and running at a top speed of 19.6 mph to make that catch. His route efficiency was 98.5 percent.

"That's my first taste of how ... really good he is," Angels closer Huston Street said after recording the save with a 1-2-3 ninth. "I swear to you when he caught it, I was like, 'Wow, that's a great play.' But I guess you've just seen him make so many plays, I really wasn't surprised."

QUOTABLE

"That's the good thing about having five pitches you can throw for strikes. If you have them, you can do whatever you want." -- *Santiago, on throwing only changeups in the fourth inning and zero breaking balls from the start of the fourth until he exited with two outs in the eighth*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Cliff Pennington pinch-ran for Pujols in the top of the eighth, then checked in at first base for the first time in his nine-year career in the bottom half. Counting the playoffs, Pennington had seen action at second base, third base, shortstop, left field and pitcher, but never first base. He got some time there this spring, though, and made a nice charging play on a slow roller.

"We're not going to hesitate to put him out there," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "The only way you're going to get game experience is to get out there. If we need him to try to get back into a game and play first base, he's able to do that. He's comfortable."

WHAT'S NEXT

Angels: Matt Shoemaker takes the mound for the series finale hoping to make up for a rough first start. Shoemaker gave up six runs and recorded only nine outs when he faced the Rangers on Friday, giving up seven hits and three walks. He had a 6.04 ERA in five starts against the A's last year.

Athletics: Left-hander Eric Surkamp returns to the mound Wednesday for a 12:35 p.m. PT start against the visiting Angels. Surkamp went 4 1/3 innings in his A's debut in Seattle on Friday, allowing two runs on four hits with one walk and two strikeouts in his first start since July 23, 2013.

Soto mojo: Late HR the difference for Halos

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Players will tell you, almost unanimously, that the hardest part of their jobs is to be productive with sporadic opportunities. Hitting is a craft that must be worked on daily, but Major League pitching is a skill that can't be simulated. Geovany Soto tries, though.

He is 33 now, early in his 12th season and gradually transitioning into a backup role. So three-to-four times a week, he finds the pitching machine, sets it up in the batting cage and turns up the velocity as high as it goes, generating fastballs that travel into the mid-90s to keep his mind sharp and, as he said, "get your hands to fire."

It helped prepare him for Tuesday's ninth inning.

Down a run, with one out and a runner on first base at the Coliseum, Soto saw one of those mid-90s fastballs from A's closer Sean Doolittle and fouled it off. Soto saw another one, coming in right down the middle and traveling precisely 93.6 mph, and he stayed right on it, lining a 426-foot shot to left-center field that gave the Angels a lead and led them to a 5-4 victory, their third in a row.

"He's one of the best lefties out there," Soto said of Doolittle. "I was just trying to get something out over the plate to do something with it."

In Doolittle's mind, the pitch ended up "in kind of like a buffer zone." He lamented about not elevating it high enough, because Soto, as Doolittle said, "is a good fastball hitter. You can use it against him if you execute and locate your fastball, but I didn't locate it and I got burned."

It was Soto's second hit of the night -- he would've had a third if not for Josh Reddick's diving catch on a sinking liner -- and his third hit in 11 plate appearances all year. Carlos Perez, the 25-year-old catcher who has in many ways become Soto's pupil, already has 18 plate appearances and is in line for another four on Wednesday afternoon.

Soto has accepted his role as a part-time player, but it doesn't mean it has been easy.

"You feel like once you've been around, and you can understand your role, you have to work hard on that," Soto said. "A lot of extra work, man. A lot of extra work and concentration to try to stay with that rhythm, so when you are in there, you do the best you can for the club."

That, more so than anything else, is what has resonated most about Soto with this club.

He's a former All-Star and National League Rookie of the Year Award winner, a free-agent-in-waiting and someone who is still young enough to be the main guy behind the plate. But he isn't bitter about being a backup. He's vocal in meetings, he reminds players about their assignments during games he isn't playing in, and he has gone out of his way to mentor others.

It's why the Angels signed him; why so many of his teammates were thrilled that he ended up with the big hit.

"Everybody wants to play," Angels closer Huston Street said. "Everybody wants to play and be the guy. But I've absolutely seen him make a concerted effort to make Carlos Perez a better player. That's signs of a very, very, very secure person. A very confident, secure person. He has come off to me as a true teammate. And that's what you need out of your catchers."

Shoemaker hopes to rebound in second start

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Right-hander Matt Shoemaker matches up against A's lefty Eric Surkamp on Wednesday afternoon in the series finale from the Coliseum as the Angels go for a sweep of the three-game series.

Surkamp had his contract selected from Triple-A Nashville on Friday and held the division-rival Mariners to two runs in 4 1/3 innings, giving up four hits, walking a batter and striking out two. Surkamp, 28, joined the A's as a non-roster invitee, finished Spring Training with a 3.60 ERA in 20 innings and ultimately took the rotation spot of Felix Doubront, who underwent Tommy John surgery on Tuesday.

Shoemaker was roughed up during Spring Training, giving up 19 runs on 30 hits (nine of them home runs) in 25 innings, then recorded only nine outs against the Rangers on Friday. The 29-year-old made five starts against the A's last season and posted a 6.04 ERA.

Things to know

- Both teams will be off on Thursday, with the Angels traveling to Minnesota for a three-game series at Target Field and the A's staying at home to host the defending-champion Royals starting Friday.
- C.J. Cron sat on Tuesday, getting a breather after starting the season 2-for-26, but is expected back in the lineup on Wednesday. Cron has reverse splits, with a career .675 OPS against lefties and a .741 OPS against righties.
- Pitcher Ryan Madson, who was with the Angels in 2013 but was never able to appear in a game, has not allowed a run in each of his first four games (four innings) and has a 16-game, 15-inning regular-season scoreless streak dating back to last year.

Angels hoping Cron kicks slow start

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- C.J. Cron's 2016 season is starting off similarly to his 2015 season.

The Angels hope he recovers a lot quicker.

Cron has only two hits in his first 26 at-bats, striking out five times, drawing zero walks and prompting Angels manager Mike Scioscia to start Ji-Man Choi in his place -- at designated hitter -- for Tuesday's game against the A's.

A year ago, Cron, didn't get hot until about July, after batting .204 through the first two months and getting optioned twice.

Cron came off the bench to draw a key walk in the ninth inning, just ahead of teammate Geovany Soto's two-run home run that gave the Angels a 5-4 victory.

Scioscia said he just wants Cron to "exhale a little bit," and that he expects him to return to the lineup for the Wednesday afternoon series finale from the Coliseum.

"We need him," Scioscia said. "We need him. You saw in the second half last year, when he came up, how important he was to us. Right now, he's just not where he will be."

Albert Pujols started his second consecutive game at first base, a position he didn't play in the regular season's first week and one he started at just twice throughout Spring Training.

The 36-year-old picked up the first stolen base -- for him and his team -- in Monday night's 4-1 victory over the A's, then shot some hoops with Draymond Green and Steph Curry of the Warriors on Tuesday afternoon.

Pujols is a full five months removed from surgery to his right foot, and his legs seem to be feeling lighter.

"It's just good to be back out there on the field," Pujols said. "Whenever I feel good, I'm going to be out there on the field."

Worth noting

- Tyler Skaggs is scheduled to pitch four innings in his next start for Triple-A Salt Lake, which would fall on Friday. He would then make back-to-back five-inning starts, lining him up to potentially return to the Major Leagues by early to mid-May.
- Despite a Thursday off day, Scioscia will keep his rotation in order, with Garrett Richards, Jered Weaver and Nick Tropeano starting the upcoming weekend series in Minnesota, respectively. They'll each take the mound with an extra day of rest.

FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Angels reliever Joe Smith beats Warriors' Stephen Curry in game of PIG

Joe Smith made a blind, backward, over-the-head free throw that Stephen Curry couldn't match. Then, the Angels reliever stymied the reigning NBA most valuable player and a prolific shooter on a left-handed three-point basket to win a good-natured game of PIG on Tuesday.

"That was fun. I loved it. ... Sometimes a little bit of luck, a lot bit of luck," Smith said.

It sure made Smith's day to walk away a winner from the Golden State Warriors' practice. Smith, infielder Cliff Pennington, and sluggers Albert Pujols and Mike Trout attended practice before their night game against the Oakland Athletics.

Golden State (72-9) was preparing for its regular-season finale Wednesday against Memphis, when the Warriors will try to surpass the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls' record for victories in a season.

Smith took his victory in stride. He received handshakes and hugs from Curry.

"Well, you don't go into something expecting you're going to lose, that ain't how you become a professional athlete," Smith said. "Everything you do you want to win. But that was pretty cool.

"I just got lucky, I was in front of him and there were four guys. All of his tough shots, everybody else missed. We knew somebody had to beat him. We couldn't walk out of here without a win, you know? That's not making ESPN."

Trout topped Draymond Green in a separate game.

Curry got a kick out of having the Angels in the house.

"I've watched Albert Pujols for years and never met him before so that's pretty cool, and obviously Mike Trout and the rest of the teammates, talented guys in their trade, so it's pretty cool that they'd come out and watch us practice and get to chop it up for a little bit."

Of course, he said all that before losing to Smith.

Soto powers Angels past A's on ninth-inning home run

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Geovany Soto spent the final month of the 2014 season with Oakland, and he caught Sean Doolittle during that stretch.

Still, that didn't make standing in against the Athletics' closer much easier Tuesday night.

Soto hit a go-ahead two-run homer with one out in the ninth, and the Los Angeles Angels rallied against Oakland's improved bullpen to beat the Athletics 5-4.

Albert Pujols hit a two-run double in the eighth off Ryan Madson to get the Angels back in the game.

"It shows a lot of character. It shows that's what we're all about, we never stop, we're always going to keep coming after you," Soto said. "You have to beat us 27 outs. It's a good quality to have and it's a good model that we're trying to establish."

Marcus Semien homered twice and Josh Reddick drove in two runs for the A's, who will try to avoid a sweep Wednesday afternoon.

Pujols and Mike Trout, along with reliever Joe Smith and infielder Cliff Pennington, spent the morning at Golden State Warriors practice and shooting around with the defending NBA champions. Trout even beat Draymond Green at PIG before going 0 for 4 with a strikeout in his game that mattered.

Doolittle (1-2) and Madson couldn't get it done after Kendall Graveman's strong start and Oakland lost its third one-run game while playing its sixth such contest.

"I'll be here for a while tonight looking to see if there's a pattern. I'm going watch some video and see what adjustments I can make," Doolittle said. "I've been a little inconsistent."

Mike Morin retired one batter in the eighth for the win before Huston Street finished for his third save in as many days.

"Tonight's game was a micro example of who we are as a team and who we will continue to be," he said. "I was impressed with this team when we started the season 1-4. I didn't see anybody drop their heads."

Semien homered in the third and again in the seventh. It was his second career two-homer game and first since May 10 last year at Seattle.

A's designated hitter Billy Butler was back in the starting lineup for the first time in six games after sitting the past five against right-handed starters. He went 0 for 4 with a strikeout and grounded into a double play.

Pennington, who entered to run for Pujols in the eighth and stayed in the game, played first base for the first time in his nine-year career.

Graveman allowed one run on four hits with three strikeouts and two walks over six innings. He held Trout and Pujols hitless in their initial five at-bats with a strikeout and walk to cleanup hitter Pujols.

Angels starter Hector Santiago allowed four earned runs on seven hits in 7 2/3 innings, struck out three and walked one.

SMITH'S TRIUMPH

Smith did the unthinkable earlier in the day: He topped reigning NBA MVP Stephen Curry in a game of PIG.

The reliever made a blind, backward, over-the-head free throw that Stephen Curry couldn't match. Then, the Angels pitcher stymied Curry on a left-handed 3-pointer and had suddenly beaten arguably the world's best basketball player at a good-natured game of PIG.

"That was fun. I loved it," a giddy Smith said. "I'm not that bad. I ain't that good either. Sometimes a little bit of luck, a lot bit of luck."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: LHP Tyler Skaggs, working back from reconstructive elbow surgery, will pitch four innings for Triple-A Salt Lake at Sacramento on Friday, then will have two five-inning outings. ... Struggling 1B C.J. Cron had most of the day off to "exhale" as manager Mike Scioscia put it.

Athletics: LHP Felix Doubront underwent Tommy John surgery to repair a torn elbow ligament using a hamstring graft in this case. The surgery was performed by Dr. Timothy Kremchek in Cincinnati. A's athletic trainer Nick Paparesta said a small bone also was removed from the elbow area. ... RHP Henderson Alvarez (right shoulder surgery) felt good facing hitters Monday

and the A's were planning a simulated game as his next step. ... INF Eric Sogard (strained neck) was in Oakland to work out and scheduled to play nine innings at SS for Class A Stockton on Wednesday night.

UP NEXT

Angels: RHP Matt Shoemaker (0-1, 18.00 ERA) looks to bounce back from his first outing last Friday against Texas during which he surrendered six earned runs in three innings.

Athletics: LHP Eric Surkamp (0-0, 4.15 ERA) faces the Angels for the first time in his career making his second start after being recalled from Triple-A Nashville last Friday to make his Oakland debut that night in Seattle.