

## HOPES HIGH FOR TROUT'S ANGELS

For long-suffering Los Angeles Angels 'fans, this might be the year. If baseball is ever played, that is.

Major League Baseball may or may not survive the political battles between owners and players, or the Covid-19 pandemic, but it appears as if an abbreviated schedule comprising 60 or 70 games might eventually be agreed upon, with games played in empty stadiums. But watching on TV will be just as fun for Angels 'fans, who have many reasons for optimism. In fact, this might be the year that the Angels make it back to the World Series for the first time since 2002, finally giving Fall Classic exposure to Mike Trout, the best player in the game today.

Trout is 29 years old; baseball historians point to decades worth of statistics to indicate that a player's prime generally occurs during his 29th year. Already a lock for the Hall of Fame, Trout is not only in the prime of his career, but the Angels 'much improved batting order seems destined to give Trout more opportunity than ever for a sensational offensive season.

After finishing 35 games out of first place in the American League West in 2019 with a 72-90 record, the Angels made a huge acquisition in the off-season, signing free-agent third baseman Anthony Rendon from the World Series champion Washington Nationals. Rendon, who finished third in MVP voting in the National League, batted .319 last year, with 34 homers and an OPS figure (on-base percentage plus slugging average) of 1.010. Put Rendon in the lineup behind Trout, and opposing pitchers, fearing Rendon's explosive bat, will suddenly start offering Trout more hittable pitches. Two men don't make a team, though, and that's where dual threat Shohei Ohtani comes in. The slugging and pitching Japanese star, the A.L. rookie of the year in 2018, missed more than one-third of last season due to injuries, but he's healthy again, ready to lead the pitching staff and join Trout, Rendon, Justin Upton and aging veteran Albert Pujols in one of the most potentially explosive lineups in the game.

Trout is generally acknowledged as today's best player. He is a two-time American League MVP, has bashed 285 home runs in nine seasons and carries a career slash of .305/.419/.581, with 903 runs-batted-in. But missing from his resumé is a World Series title. While that omission won't keep him out of Cooperstown, it would be a shame if Trout doesn't at least once get to show the world his skills in October. This could be the year.

- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg** on Twitter: "Dallas Cowboy **Ezekiel Elliott** has contracted the coronavirus. Which is surprising because Elliott usually holds out on contracts."
- Comedy guy **Brad Dickson** of Omaha: "A driver is retiring because NASCAR is banning Confederate flags. I only hope this news doesn't harm the image of NASCAR as a sport of sophisticated, worldly, intellectual free thinkers."
- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Three teams — the Astros, Red Sox and Mets — fired their managers in the aftermath of Houston's sign-stealing trash-bangers. Or, more precisely, they canned them."
- **RJ Currie** of [sportsdeke.com](http://sportsdeke.com): "Former Dodger **Shawn Green** holds the MLB single-game mark of 19 total bases—four homers, a double and a single. The last guy to get past first base so often in one night was **Tiger Woods**."
- Another one from Currie: "Reuters reports an elephant in the Washington, DC, zoo took up playing the harmonica. Zookeepers nicknamed her CFL because she plays for peanuts."
- **Janice Hough** of [leftcoastsportsbabe.com](http://leftcoastsportsbabe.com): "As hotels are announced for NBA teams at Disney World, I think I speak for all comedy writers in saying it's a real shame the Knicks aren't part of this. The jokes just write themselves with 'Mickey Mouse Organization.'"
- **Dwight Perry** again: "PGA Tour player **Harold Varner III** took advantage of his time at home during the coronavirus quarantine to install ... a septic tank. There wasn't a dry eye in sight when a fan showed up just as it was being lowered to yell 'Get in the hole!'"

**Bob Molinaro** of [pilotonline.com](http://pilotonline.com) (Hampton, Va.): "Social distancing will not interrupt the gluttony and star-spangled grossness of Nathan's July 4th Hot Dog Eating Contest. Contestants will be at least six foot-longs apart as they set out to determine who will be this year's wiener."

**Brad Dickson** again: "Yesterday (Nebraska coach) **Scott Frost** said his players are not afraid of coronavirus and that it's brought the team closer together. Hey, if this pandemic means that Nebraska goes 5-7 instead of 4-8 it will have all been worth it."

**RJ Currie** again: "Canadian **Jolene Van Vugt** set a speed record in Australia by driving 75 km/h on a motorized toilet. The lady wasn't kidding — she really had to go."

Headline in [TheOnion.com](http://TheOnion.com): "Red Sox ask fans to switch from racial to homophobic slurs when taunting opposing players" *Care to comment? Email [brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca](mailto:brucepenton2003@yahoo.ca)*