

SPORTS

SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2019 :: LATIMES.COM/SPORTS

Orioles are not looking so lowly in series

They get to Peters and Buttrey to beat the Angels for the third game in a row.

**BALTIMORE 8
ANGELS 7**

By Maria Torres

Ty Buttrey is dependable, a 6-foot-6 titan who can hurl 99-mph heaters and strike out more than one-quarter of the batters he faces. The Angels rookie reliever gets the ball in tied scores or when the team has a small deficit.

But the 26-year-old also has made 48 appearances, tied for second-most on the team. And in the Angels' 8-7 loss to the Baltimore Orioles on Saturday at Angel Stadium, he could not replicate his success. He failed to preserve an eighth-inning tie. The Angels mounted a late rally but could not overcome Buttrey's performance as they dropped their third game in a row to a team on pace for more than 100 losses.

Buttrey gave up a leadoff hit to Jonathan Villar, plunked Stevie Wilkerson in the thigh to end a long at-bat, watched both runners advance on a dribbler to the mound and gave up a hard-hit single up the middle. The hit drove in two runs and knocked Buttrey out of the game before he could record a second out.

"The stuff looks the same," manager Brad Ausmus said. "Most players — pitchers and hitters — will have an occasional bad month or not an up-to-par month. I'm not concerned."

Buttrey (6-5) gave up two runs in the eighth inning [See Angels, D7]



JOHN MCCOY/Getty Images

MIKE TROUT tied the score 2-2 with a two-run home run in the first inning against Baltimore.



Photographs by WALLY SKALIJ/Los Angeles Times

JON LEONOUKAKIS pitches to Stephen Dolainski, a friend of an Alzheimer's patient, during a meeting in Los Angeles held by BaseALZ, a group that uses baseball to help stir the memories of patients with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Living in the pastime

For people suffering from Alzheimer's, baseball brings back memories

By Bill Plaschke

It starts with a baseball.

Each person who attends the monthly BaseALZ program in a conference room at the offices of Alzheimer's Los Angeles is handed one, faded and scuffed.

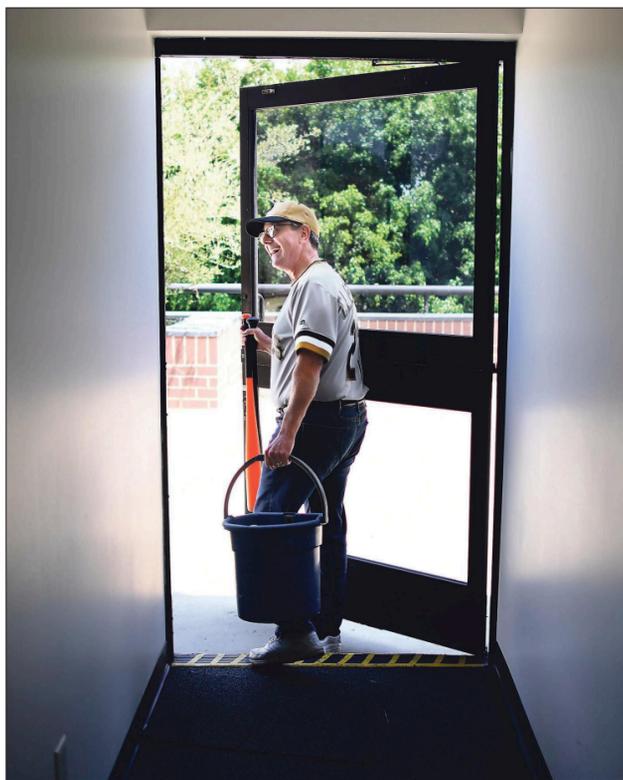
For the next two hours, those suffering from Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia will hold that baseball.

Some will clutch it tightly as they listen to stories about former baseball greats. Others will roll it around in their palms as they watch presentations about baseball's historic moments. At some point, they will be asked to reach back into their own baseball history.

Through the magic of those 108 stitches, they will remember.

"My friends and I lived near each other, we'd play together," Al Hassan, 82, says with a grin. "I wasn't very good, I played way out in the field. There was a little creek they put me near in case I had to jump in the water. It happened three or four times. I think they were agitating me!"

It's a bright Friday morning, and Hassan laughs, and across the table, Dolores Jones, 89, soon joins



LEONOUKAKIS and the Society for American Baseball Research brought the program to L.A. after hearing of its success.

him.

"There was this St. Louis pitcher, I would stay up late to watch him on TV," she says with a grin. "He put his cap low; it was scary for hitters. They're looking for his eyes, they'd let a pitch go by."

Jon Leonoudakis, the meeting facilitator dressed in a gold vintage Pittsburgh Pirates jersey and cap, jumps in.

"Oh, you're talking about Bob Gibson," he says, pausing, then raising his voice in wonder. "And did you know he wore glasses?"

The room instantly buzzes with oohs and aahs and lights in eyes that have been growing dim. Baseball has done it again. Baseball has wrapped its arms around unsettled souls and taken them out to the ballgame.

"Watching what happens here is like watching people come to life," says Anne Oh, manager of support groups and activity programs for ALZLA.

Even in a summer when the major leagues' best team plays at Dodger Stadium and its best player plays at Angel Stadium, nowhere is the power of baseball in Los Angeles better illustrated than on the fourth floor of this mid-Wilshire office building.

Led by members of the Los Angeles chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research, a [See Plaschke, D7]

Influence his uncle had on him is indelible

Buehler's tattoo is a message he received early, from a relative who died young.

By Mia Berry

On the day he turned 17, Walker Buehler, accompanied by his girlfriend and his mother, went to the basement of a family friend's house in Lexington, Ky.

Buehler gave a tattoo artist a baseball with his favorite handwritten inscription on it, a note from his late uncle.

Thirty minutes later, Buehler glanced in the mirror at his first and only tattoo on the left side of his

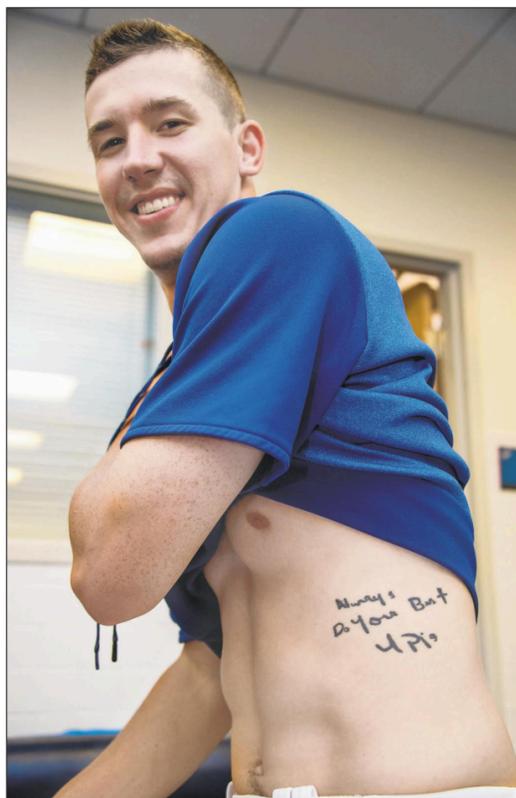
torso that read in identical script, "Always do your best U Pig."

"I didn't want my kids to get any tattoos. I don't have any tattoos," said Tony Buehler, Walker's father. "But [when] I saw my kid got that tattoo, I started crying."

Tony Buehler said his brother gave Walker that baseball when he was 10 or 11. "Before we had any idea what Walker would become," Tony said.

What Buehler has become is one of the best young pitchers in baseball. When he starts for the Dodgers on Sunday, the day he turns 25, he will take a 9-1 record and a 3.23 ERA into a matchup with the Washington Nationals.

[See Buehler, D5]



Jon Soohoo/Los Angeles Dodgers

WALKER BUEHLER displays the tattoo he got at age 17 that reads, "Always do your best U Pig."

Catcher rising star in romp over Nationals

In his first game since return, Dodgers' Smith has six RBIs to support Kershaw.

**DODGERS 9
WASHINGTON 3**

By Jorge Castillo

WASHINGTON — For more than a month, between the time he was sent back to the minors and called back up to the Dodgers on Friday, catching prospect Will Smith loomed large in Los Angeles. While he continued mashing triple-A pitching in Oklahoma City, building a resume that was impossible to ignore, the Dodgers'

catchers continued posting inadequate offensive production. It was simply a matter of time before Smith returned.

The Dodgers finally made the move Thursday to replace the struggling Austin Barnes, believing Smith was ready to assume the primary catching role after his sustained prolific production in the Pacific Coast League. It would not take much to provide an upgrade. Barnes was one of the worst offensive players in the majors this season. Smith carried potential and represented a boost.

The rookie did not waste any time. In his first game back Saturday, Smith went three for three with an oppo- [See Dodgers, D5]

BASEBALL

ANGELS REPORT

Ramirez is about to come off the injured list

BY MARIA TORRES

The end of **JC Ramirez's** Tommy John surgery rehabilitation is finally near.

The Angels right-hander has only one outing remaining, on Sunday at Class-A Inland Empire, before he is reinstated from the 60-day injured list early in the week.

He said Saturday at Angel Stadium, where he has spent parts of the last few weeks between rehab outings, that he feels much closer to where he was before his elbow was surgically reconstructed in April 2018.

It was only a month ago that Ramirez was so far from his previous form — he went 11-10 with a 4.15 ERA in 27 games for the Angels in 2017 — the Angels asked him to extend his rehabilitation for an additional 30 days and decided to use him as a reliever.

An alteration in mechanics helped Ramirez rebound. He fell into bad habits during the early stages of his throwing program. He shortened his arm action, bringing his elbow up higher as he released a pitch, and



JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/Getty Images

JC RAMIREZ is scheduled to make a rehab start Sunday before coming off the injured list for the first time since having elbow surgery in April 2018.

immediately saw results. His fastball velocity increased into the 92-94-mph range, closer to his previous 95.5-mph average in the major leagues, and the angle of his pitches improved. His slider, especially, received a boost.

"It was the same slider that I had before and I was really, really happy about it," Ramirez said. "If tomorrow I can continue to do that, being consistent throwing my slider, I'd say I'm good to go."

Ramirez's return will be a

boon for the bullpen. The Angels have relied so heavily on their relievers, they have put more innings on their bullpen than every team in their division except the Seattle Mariners. Even accounting for their consistent

use of an opener, the Angels have used their relievers for nearly 400 innings. That mark would still rank in the top 10 in the major leagues.

Adding Ramirez should help alleviate the burden that has been shouldered by rookie **Ty Buttrey**, closer **Hansel Robles** and veteran **Cam Bedrosian**, all of whom have pitched more than 48 innings.

"It's been a long process," Ramirez said. "Some days you feel good, some other days you don't feel that good. But being in this position right now, where I know everything is going well, and if I continue to feel good I'll be with the team, that's a big thing for me."

Short hops

Two days after falling so ill he was told to stay home, reliever **Noe Ramirez** got worse and was retroactively placed on the injured list because of a viral infection. He will be eligible for reinstatement Aug. 3. The Angels don't think he will spend the whole week sick, but the lingering effects of a 16-inning game meant the team needed urgent bullpen help.

By placing Ramirez on the injured list, the Angels were able to recall left-hander **Dillon Peters** for a start Saturday. ... **Nick Tropeano** was optioned following his five-inning, seven-run performance Friday. The Angels also promoted **Jose Rodriguez**, a right-hander from Venezuela who signed with the Angels as a 17-year-old in 2012. He was a starter until this season, so he can pitch multiple innings out of the bullpen. Rodriguez has a 6.49 ERA in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League but has struck out 39 batters in 34⅓ innings for triple-A Salt Lake. ... Left-handed starter **Andrew Heaney** has thrown for three consecutive days and not felt any discomfort in his inflamed shoulder. He is progressing, he said, but "not quite where I wanted to be. ... I've dealt with this kind of [stuff] a lot, so I know how it goes. I know not to get excited about good days. I know not to get down on bad days. I know not to push too hard." There is no timetable for his return. He will need some time to regain arm strength before activation.

Lowly Orioles keep soaring higher against the Angels

[Angels, from D1]

Thursday, the night the Angels lost to the Orioles in 16 innings and put themselves in a position to use spot starters in consecutive games. That time his stuff was flat, his pitches more passive than usual. He pinpointed a few things on which to work.

They didn't take. On Saturday, Buttrey hung his off-speed offerings, mislocated his fastball and never got in a rhythm. His earned-run average soared above 3.00 for the first time.

"I just absolutely sucked today," said Buttrey, who has given up seven runs and is being hit at a .361 clip in his last eight innings. "It can't happen again."

Mike Trout, Shohei Ohtani and Albert Pujols hitting home runs Saturday. David Fletcher collected four hits in a game for the first time in his career. In a back-and-forth game, their hits hardly mattered.

After Fletcher's two-out double for a 4-2 lead in the second inning, the Angels never again went ahead.

Dillon Peters, who seemed to have things figured out last weekend in Seattle, was rocked for five runs on a night the Angels extended their losing streak to three games. He gave up

eight hits in four innings.

The outing could have doomed the team with a bullpen so weary it made three moves — calling up minor leaguer Jose Rodriguez, moving Noe Ramirez to the injured list and recalling Peters for a spot start — to shore up their defenses.

But Trevor Cahill pitched three effective innings. He limited damage to Villar's solo home run that gave the Orioles a 6-5 lead in the sixth inning.

It still was not enough. Buttrey gave up two runs in the eighth inning. Rodriguez flashed a 95-mph fastball and threw 1⅓ scoreless innings.

The Angels scored a run in the ninth inning on Fletcher's single to left field but left three runners stranded when Justin Upton, who was 10 for 46 in 13 games before Saturday, popped out.

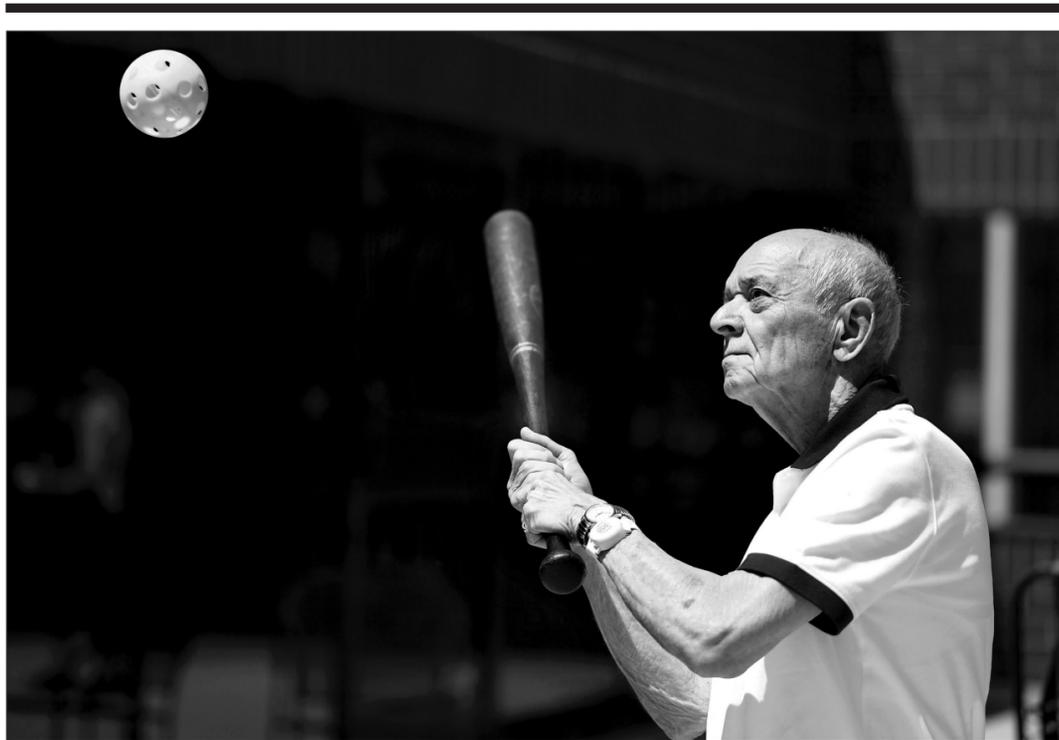
On the heels of a heartening two-game sweep of the Dodgers, the Angels tumbled further down the wild-card standings to five games out of second place a few days before the July 31 trade deadline.

"You don't ever want to lose three in a row," Ausmus said. "But with the trade deadline coming up, [this stretch is] not ideal."



JOHN MCCOY/Getty Images

THIRD BASEMAN Matt Thaiss can't stop a ball hit by Renato Nunez that goes for a third-inning double.



WALLY SKALIJ/Los Angeles Times

RICHARD MACHINSKI swings at a Wiffle Ball in an exercise to help stir the memories of patients with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. "It's what we did when I was 8 years old," he says. "It keeps you alive."

Baseball used as therapy

[Plaschke, from D1] group of as many seven dementia patients and their companion caregivers participates in what is known as baseball reminiscence therapy.

In sessions designed to elicit moments of clarity through a century-old connection with the national pastime, participants talk ball, sing ball, and even play a little ball. According to their caretakers, it is the first time some of them have engaged in weeks.

From talk of Little League to thoughts of autograph chases, delving deep into poignant childhood memories, there is something about the ancient sport that rustles the mind.

"Baseball is a game of storytelling; it's the heart and soul of the sport. Everyone has baseball stories, everyone has baseball memories," says Leonoudakis, 61, a producer who brought the program here after hearing about its success in the Central/South Texas SABR chapter.

"These people grew up during the game's golden age, so it seems like such a natural fit."

Oh, whose office also hosts therapeutic programs involving art, music, gardening and dance, says baseball touches a nerve.

"It brings them to the present," she says. "Individuals with dementia are often just home and not engaging in conversation, not being stimulated with activities. When they come here, it stirs up strong memories they have not thought about for a long time. It opens them up. It's real and important socialization."

It starts with a baseball, but officially begins with a song. On this Friday, after Leonoudakis passes out baseballs from a plastic

'That swing is for how hard it is to do this, to be a caretaker and companion, to live this every day. This gets the stress out.'

— EVA MACHINSKI, after taking a cathartic swing of a Wiffle bat with her husband

grocery bag — they're remnants from his youth league coaching days — he pulls out a guitar and everyone stands up.

Because of the usual last-minute cancellations, and because the innovative program has been around only a year and still is gaining traction, there are only three participants today. But, along with their caregivers, they sing the national anthem like they are a group of 30,000.

"Play ball!" Leonoudakis finally shouts, marking the beginning of what is essentially an admission-free day at an imaginary ballpark.

There are concessions, with free pecan cookies, water and coffee. There are bobblehead dolls, with Leonoudakis passing around tiny sculptures of the generation-spanning Clayton Kershaw, Randy Johnson and Tom Seaver.

Then there are stories, plenty of stories, with this week's tales focused on legendary Negro Leagues pitcher Chet Brewer and that wonderful Pasadena historical institution known as The Baseball Reliquary.

But the best tales come from the participants themselves, spurred by a

Leonoudakis question.

"When you hold that baseball in your hands, what does your heart and soul say?" he asks.

Hassan says, "Watch me, I throw pretty good."

Jones says, "I haven't been to a baseball game in a long time. I wanted to come here to see what it was like."

Then Richard Machinski, 78, speaks for the first time.

"It's what we did when I was 8 years old," he says. "It keeps you alive."

Machinski is handed a photo by his wife Eva. It was from when he coached a youth league team in Bremerton, Wash., in the early '70s.

There are two girls on the boys' team, an odd sight for that era, and Machinski suddenly remembers why.

"I said, 'If they don't play, we don't play,'" he says.

As his health declined, Machinski has increasingly clung to his moments with this group. He constantly asks Eva about the date of the next session. One of his drawings from an art therapy session illustrated this longing.

Amid bright colors he wrote, "I draw pictures, I give them to my wife because I love her, it's now baseball time."

Machinski even recently brought in flour sacks that were used as baseball jerseys by his naval team.

"I played pitcher and catcher," he says, and when asked if it was fun, he exclaims, "100%!"

After the presentation and discussion ends, there is a seventh-inning stretch. Of course there is. Everyone stands and Leonoudakis picks up the guitar and plays "Take Me Out To The Ballgame."

Afterward he shouts, with the excitement of a kid

hollering at his neighborhood buddies, "Let's go play some ball!"

The group then moves to a patio where Leonoudakis pitches giant yellow and white Wiffle Balls to participants wielding a black Wiffle bat.

It is the first time some of them have swung a bat in more than 50 years. Some struggle with their coordination. They step into the box tentatively, and hold the bat carefully. But once they start, man, can they hit. Everybody makes contact, driving the ball off a brick wall, into a giant plant, rattling shots around the metal furniture and even off a patio umbrella.

The companions also take their hacks, and Eva Machinski swings out of her shoes. The program is designed not only to momentarily lift the cloud from those with Alzheimer's disease, but also offer a brief respite for those who care for them.

"That swing is for how hard it is to do this, to be a caretaker and companion, to live this every day. This gets the stress out," she says, clenching her teeth before regaining her smile. "We both need this."

The last participant to come to the imaginary plate is Jones. She doesn't want to do it, but her daughter Freda urges her, and so she steps up for her first at-bat in nearly a century.

And she crushes it. She lines a ball directly off Leonoudakis' leg as witnesses howl in delight, and for a moment, everyone is present, everything is clear, and Jones beams at this walk-off hit into a warm and familiar sunset.

"I felt like I was reaching for it, and I couldn't find it," she says of the pitch. "But I found it."