



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times/TNS

Shohei Ohtani isn't quite on mathematical pace for another 50-homer, 50-steal season; but is on an early track to become the first player in MLB history with multiple 40/40 campaigns.

ANALYSIS

# Ohtani back on 40/40 pace, but his RBIs are down

BY JACK HARRIS, LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES

Shohei Ohtani is not publicly known, nor personally sees himself, as a quick starter at the plate. "Overall, in my career," he said through interpreter Will Ireton, "I don't really have a hot start in the beginning of the season."

This year, that's technically true again — but only if you hold the reigning National League MVP to his own stratospheric standards.

Through the opening three weeks, all of Ohtani's triple-slash stats are down from last year (.288/.380/.550), but only because his 2024 marks (.310/.390/.646) all topped the NL. Same story with a .930 OPS that is more than 100 points lower than his gaudy 2024 total, but still good enough to rank top 20 in

the majors.

With six home runs and five stolen bases, Ohtani isn't quite on mathematical pace for another 50-homer, 50-steal season; but is on an early track to become the first player in MLB history with multiple 40/40 campaigns.

And though he has taken a few more awkward swings than normal in the opening three weeks, he has started honing in on his power stroke, too, leading off Wednesday's win over the Colorado Rockies with a towering 448-foot blast that almost cleared the right-field pavilion.

"I think overall," he said, "it's been a really good first 20 games."

The only true area of regression so far has been in one statistical category; where a glaring drop in production has signaled a key early-season problem for the team.

After racking up 130 RBIs in 159 games last year, Ohtani has just eight in this season's opening 20 contests. Seven of them have come via his six home runs (all but one of which were solo shots). Not until Wednesday, when he returned to the plate in a seven-run first inning and knocked in Austin Barnes with an RBI single, did he record his first hit with a runner in scoring position.

"Shohei's in a good spot," manager Dave Roberts said recently. "We just need to get some guys on base for him."

That reality said more about the rest of the team's offense than its superstar leadoff man.

From the Nos. 7-9 spots in the batting order, the Dodgers have posted a .173 batting average so far, tied for worst in the majors. Prior to Wednesday, they'd given Ohtani just nine plate appearances with runners in scoring position (tied with No. 2 hitter Mookie Betts for fewest among the team's regulars). In four of those spots, he was walked.

It created an early-season conundrum for Roberts, as he tried to shake the team out of a recent offensive lull. Should he consider dropping Ohtani in the lineup, where he could get more RBI opportunities? Or should he give his offense more time to find its footing, and hope his bottom-half hitters began heating up at the plate?

"I just feel that there's guys who are gonna perform better than they have," Roberts said this week, opting for the latter. "Shohei will ultimately get those opportunities."

In an effort to stay more on top of the ball at the plate this year, Max Muncy spent his offseason purposely trying to hit grounders and low line drives. In doing so, however, he realized he had begun lurching forward in his swing. As a result, he gave himself less time to read pitches and make proper swing decisions. And even when he did, he wasn't driving the ball like usual.

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