

## SUAREZ ALMOST SAVES THE DAY

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On June 26, 2019, the Cincinnati Reds visited the Los Angeles Angels for a two-game interleague series. In its last interleague matchup, the first professional team in baseball had slayed the American League giants Houston Astros, sweeping them in Cincinnati. In this away series, the Reds stumbled, dropping game one, 1-5; they were now just hoping for a split.

The skies were clear, the temperature a crisp 73°; weather well-suited for the long ball.

Both teams threatened early, but the Reds struck first in the top of the 5<sup>th</sup>. With the bases empty and nobody out, the thundering Yasiel Puig gave the crowd a souvenir when he sent Jaime Barria's 1-0 offering over the fence, staking the Reds to a 1-0 lead.

In the bottom of the inning, Tanner Roark looked to maintain the momentum with a shutdown inning. But on his second pitch of the frame - also on a 1-0 count - Roark surrendered a moon shot to Justin Bour to tie the game at one.

The lesson for both teams: don't get behind on the big boys.

Struggling to stay ahead in the count all night, Roark walked back-to-back batters in the next inning. Even though he had given up only one run through 5.1 innings, he had allowed plenty of traffic on the basepaths (four hits, two walks). Roark was pulled in favor of Amir Garrett, who cleaned up the last two outs in the sixth and went on to ground the Angels in the 7<sup>th</sup>.

In the bottom of the 8th, with the score still tied at 1, the top of the order was due up for the Angels. Reds skipper David Bell went back to his bullpen, giving his enigmatic reliever Raisel Iglesias a clean attempt to clear the Angels threat.

Iglesias led off the 8th with a walk to the best player on the planet, Mike Trout. With a man on first and no-one out, the Angels expected run rate was 0.85, with a 41.6% chance of scoring at least one run. The Angels needed just one run to set up a save situation for their newly promoted closer, Hansel Robles, who was now warming in the pen.

After a failed pickoff attempt to curb the running game, Iglesias gave up a single to Shohei Ohtani on a 1-2 count. Ohtani was the only batter in either the 5th or 8th - the two innings with runs - to reach base while behind in the count. Now with men on 1st and 3rd and no-one out, the Angels' chance of scoring leapt to 84.4%.

Justin Upton looked to validate those odds, but after battling to a 3-2 count, he grounded out to third. What looked like an innocuous 5-3 putout in the box score was actually a savvy play by the dazzling Reds third baseman Eugenio Suarez. Suarez could have thrown to second for a possible double play after fielding the rocket off Upton's bat. But that would have probably allowed Trout to score, giving the Angels the go-ahead run.

Instead, Suarez looked Trout back to third and calmly took the sure out at first. Although Ohtani advanced to second, the Angels' chance of scoring dropped to 66.2%, a nearly 20-point swing.

Now with two runners in scoring position, Iglesias steeled himself and struck out Brian Goodwin swinging on a 1-2 count. With two outs and men on 2nd and 3rd, the Halos' chance of scoring at least one run sank to 26.4%.

Unfortunately for the Reds, though, the Angels' own third baseman answered the bell. David Fletcher fought for a full count before firing a ground ball into the hole, just out of Suarez's reach and too deep for shortstop Jose Iglesias. All the defensive-minded shortstop could do was put the ball in his pocket and watch Trout dash across home plate. The ever opportunistic Ohtani rushed to third.

Raisel Iglesias tried to keep his team's deficit to one run heading into the ninth, but he fell behind again on the mighty Bour. Bour promptly tagged Iglesias' 2-0 offering to right for a 3-run jack: A reminder not to get behind on the big boys, no matter the circumstances.

With a 1.4% of scoring 4 runs, the Reds went quietly in the 9th, and the Angels won 5-1, again. Raisel Iglesias recorded his 7th loss, and the Reds left Los Angeles searching the skies for answers.

Suarez's glove work and quick thinking almost saved the game in the 8th. Unfortunately, almost wasn't enough.