Name: _____ Date: _____

How Baseball Works, Told Through Shohei Ohtani

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 980 words

On October 17, 2025, in Los Angeles, a baseball player did two jobs in one game. He pitched, and the Milwaukee Brewers did not score a run against him. He struck out ten batters. He also batted, and he hit three home runs. His name is Shohei Ohtani. He plays for the Dodgers.

Here are the basics. A game has nine innings. In each inning, one team bats while the other plays defense. A team bats until it makes three outs. Ohtani pitched six innings. Six innings with three outs each is 18 outs, and Milwaukee did not score in any of them. After nine innings, the team with more runs wins. A tie means extra innings.

Every play starts with a pitch. A pitcher stands on a small hill called the mound. The rubber slab he stands on is 60 feet 6 inches from home plate. That night, Ohtani threw from there toward the plate. The batter stood beside it, holding a bat, and tried to hit the ball into the field.

An umpire behind home plate calls each pitch. A pitch over the plate, from about mid-chest to just below the knees, is a strike. So is a pitch the batter swings at and misses. A foul ball is a strike too, unless the batter already has two. Three strikes, and he is out. Ohtani did that to ten Brewers batters that night.

A batter is also out if a fielder catches his hit in the air. A pitch outside the strike zone is a ball. Four balls send the batter to first base on a walk. Ohtani walked three Brewers batters that night. Each out brings a team closer to three, and three outs end its turn.

The bases make a square, called the diamond, 90 feet on each side. Batters try to reach base. A run scores when a player crosses home plate. A home run is a fair ball hit over the outfield fence. The batter gets all four bases, and any runner on base scores too. Ohtani hit three of them that night.

Ohtani was born on July 5, 1994, in Oshu, Japan. In 2013, at 18, he played his first pro game for the Nippon-Ham Fighters, a team in Japan's pro league. He started in right field. That same year he also pitched in games for the team.

In 2016, he was named the most valuable player in his league. He hit 22 home runs. He also pitched, and he won ten games. Few players do both. In the major leagues, a team lists each player as a pitcher or as a position player.

One pitch from 2016 shows what his arm could do. In September, a radar gun read one of his fastballs at 164 kilometers an hour. That is about 102 miles an hour. At that time, no pitch in Japan's pro league had been faster. A fastball is nearly always a pitcher's fastest pitch.

In 2018, Ohtani joined the Angels. He won the Rookie of the Year Award, which goes to a top new player. The Angels play in the American League. That league has used a special batter

since 1973. He is the designated hitter, or DH. A DH bats in place of the pitcher and does not play in the field.

In 2021, he did both jobs for the whole season. He hit 46 home runs, and he started 23 games as a pitcher. Writers vote for the league's Most Valuable Player award. Every one of the voters put him first. That is called a unanimous vote.

In 2022, baseball changed a rule in a way that fits him. People call it the Ohtani rule. Before, a player who left the mound could not keep hitting as the DH. Now a starting pitcher who bats can stay in as the DH after he stops pitching. The lineup card names him twice, as the pitcher and as the hitter.

Baseball added a pitch clock in 2023. With no runners on base, a pitcher has 15 seconds to start each throw. If he is late, the umpire calls a ball. In 2023, the first year of the clock, the average game took 2 hours and 40 minutes. That was 24 minutes shorter than the year before. Ohtani throws every pitch with that clock running.

In December 2023, Ohtani signed with the Dodgers. In 2024, he did not pitch. He batted and ran the bases. On September 19, 2024, in Miami, he hit three home runs and stole two bases in one game. To steal a base, a runner takes the next base while the pitcher is throwing.

That night he became the first player ever with 50 home runs and 50 stolen bases in one season. That fall, the Dodgers won the World Series for the first time with him. They won it again in 2025. That was the year he went back to pitching.

In 2026, he did both jobs again. He started 14 games as a pitcher and won eight of them. He also hit 30 home runs. The Dodgers won 100 games. Then came the league championship series. There, the Brewers, the team from his big night, beat the Dodgers four games to none.

In early November 2026, MLB named Ohtani a finalist for the National League MVP award. Two other players are also finalists. One plays for the Cubs, and one plays for the Brewers. Writers vote on the winner, as they did in 2021. The winner is to be announced on November 12.

Now read that October night again. Ohtani pitched six innings, and Milwaukee did not score. Ten Brewers batters struck out. He hit three home runs and scored three of the Dodgers' five runs. The Brewers scored one run in all. Every part of that game is a number you can now count.

Questions

1. How many outs does a team make before the teams switch?

A. Two
B. Three
C. Nine

2. How far is the pitcher's rubber from home plate?

A. 90 feet
B. 15 feet
C. 60 feet 6 inches

3. Why does the lineup card name Ohtani twice?

A. He plays two spots in the field
B. The umpire made a mistake
C. He pitches and also bats as the DH

4. In the sentence "Every voter put him first. That is called a unanimous vote," what does unanimous mean?

A. Close
B. Everyone agreeing
C. Late

5. What happens if a pitcher is late starting his throw under the pitch clock?

A. The batter gets a free base
B. The game ends
C. The umpire calls a ball

Words to know

inning: one turn each
umpire: game official
mound: pitcher's hill
walk: free first base
unanimous: every vote

Answer key: How Baseball Works, Told Through Shohei Ohtani

1. B. Three
2. C. 60 feet 6 inches
3. C. He pitches and also bats as the DH
4. B. Everyone agreeing
5. C. The umpire calls a ball