

The Los Angeles Dodgers, perennial contenders with a deep and versatile roster, often adjust their batting order based on the handedness of their opponent's starting pitcher. Understanding these lineup tweaks gives fans keen insight into MLB's strategic chess game, especially in the postseason stretch run. This article dives into how Dodgers manager Dave Roberts leverages handedness matchups, platoon splits, and workload management to optimize run production, drawing from recent tools such as Oddstrader's real-time offshore odds and MLB's latest updates on star players like Shohei Ohtani.



Confirmed Starter vs Probable Starter: Setting the Context

One of the first critical steps in lineup construction is knowing who will take the mound. The Dodgers rely heavily on scouting reports and publicly available lines from sources such as Oddstrader, which provides real-time offshore odds that often reflect the expected probable starter and pitching environment. However, MLB.com's recent update that Shohei Ohtani is expected back in the lineup by September 23 adds a wrinkle to the Dodgers' offensive configurations.

Confirmed starters mean less guesswork for lineup construction; a probable starter—especially if announced late or subject to change—introduces more nuance. Roberts must anticipate not only the handedness but also the expected workload and pitch count limitations of these starters when setting the batting order.

Why Does the Starter Matter So Much?

The nature of the starter impacts which hitters are most likely to succeed early in the game. For example, if the Dodgers face a tough left-handed confirmed starter, they lean more heavily on right-handed batters with strong platoon splits or left-handed hitters with proficiency against southpaws. Conversely, if a probable righty expected to be knocked early begins, the Dodgers might prioritize balanced or matchup-driven flexibility, aiming to get ahead early in counts and capitalize as relievers enter.

Starter Workload and Pitch Count Context

Starter usage affects how [dodgerblue.com](https://www.dodgerblue.com) quickly opposing bullpens are deployed, which in turn affects how Roberts manages his bench and pinch-hitting options. A starter limping toward a 90-pitch threshold may mean an earlier dose of fresh arms. This quick bullpen trip often changes the mid-and-late game landscape, especially regarding handedness.

For example:

- Facing a left-handed starter with a durable track record often keeps the Dodgers on their toes in the first 6-7 innings without heavy pinch-hitting use.
- Against a probable starter with a known pitch count cap or recent injury history, Roberts may preemptively stack the lineup with hitters who excel against relievers expected to enter early.

Data-Driven Insights

Recent pitch count logs show Dodgers' opposing pitchers with the fewest innings also tend to be pull-heavy and strikeout prone. Roberts, armed with both traditional scouting and sabermetrics, often either loads his bench with lefty-righty pinch hit options or keeps the lineup balanced to reduce platoon exposure.

Lineup Construction and Rest Days: Balancing Act of Handedness

The Dodgers' roster depth and strategic rest days play a defining role in how Roberts arranges the order. With star players like Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman regularly receiving days off, the roster's handedness balance shifts dynamically.

For instance, if a left-handed bat is rested against a right-handed starter, a right-handed hitter is often inserted, shifting the balance toward more right-handed bats but with considerations for maintaining overall order flow. This affects not just the starting nine but available bench bats for late-inning pinch-hitting.

Common Adjustments

- If Ohtani is back as of September 23 and starts as a right-handed hitter (his usual profile), Roberts can strike a better lefty-righty balance against left-handed starters.
- When resting a right-handed hitter, left-handed bats with strong platoon merit fill spots in the lineup — for example, lefty Brett Baty entering against a lefty starter.
- Bench players with complementary splits are kept available to pinch hit in high-leverage situations dictated by matchups.

Platoon Splits and Handedness: Why the Dodgers Swirl the Lineup

Platoon splits remain the backbone of the Dodgers' handedness strategy. Historically, left-handed pitchers yield better statistics against left-handed batters due to angle, velocity, and pitch movement. The reverse is true for right-handed pitchers. The Dodgers exploit this with a meticulous blend of:

1. **Primary batters with strong career platoon splits** — Mookie Betts burns righties, while some hitters have reverse splits that expand Roberts' options.
2. **Situational pinch hitters** — Lefty-righty options deployed late, depending on bullpen matchup.
3. **Lineup balance to avoid extended exposure** — Ensuring predictable alternation prevents opposing pitchers from focusing on one side of the plate repeatedly.

Statistical Snapshot of Platoon Splits

Dodgers Player vs Left-Handed Pitchers (BA/SLG) vs Right-Handed Pitchers (BA/SLG) Note Mookie Betts (2024) .310 / .520 .280 / .480 Above average vs both; slight edge vs LHP Freddie Freeman (2024) .290 / .540 .300 / .560 Reverse splits; nearly equal Gavin Lux (2024) .270 / .450 .240 / .400 Better vs LHP; used in specific lineup spots Yency Almonte (Pinch hitter) .320 / .600 .190 / .350 Specializes as lefty pinch hitter

Pinch Hit Planning: Key to Late-Game Handedness Matchups

Pinch hitting is a vital component of how handedness changes the Dodgers lineup mid-game. It's not simply "who's hot" but rather who fits the platoon puzzle. Roberts depends heavily on bench players with strong splits — often one lefty, one righty — ready to enter against bullpen specialists.

- When facing a tough left-handed reliever entering in the 7th or 8th inning, the Dodgers will often call on a right-handed pinch hitter with power against lefties.
- If a right-handed reliever dominates left-handed batters, a speedy left-handed pinch hitter may enter to spark a rally or put pressure on the defense.
- The timing of these substitutions aligns closely with pitch count trends, bullpen exhaustion, and the current game score, illustrating how workload affects matchup decisions.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Analyzing Lineups

A frequent error among fans and analysts alike is confusing lineup adjustments as purely driven by odds or "betting lines." While tools such as Oddstrader provide valuable real-time insight, the Dodgers' lineup is never about ticket prices or product pricing; it centers on deep baseball analytics, scouting, and player health.

Similarly, the presence or absence of betting lines in public reports is irrelevant to lineup decisions and should not be conflated with managerial strategy. Always focus on:

- Confirmed vs probable starters and their pitch arsenals
- Player health and rest patterns
- Historical platoon splits and matchup tendencies
- In-game pitch count and bullpen depletion trends

Conclusion

The Dodgers' batting order is a carefully calibrated puzzle of handedness matchups, workload management, and platoon strategy. Utilizing data from tools like Oddstrader to anticipate starters, combined with MLB.com's roster updates such as Shohei Ohtani's expected return, helps manager Dave Roberts craft a balanced lineup designed to maximize run scoring and minimize exposure to adverse matchups.



As the season races toward the playoffs, understanding how opponent starter handedness influences the Dodgers lineup – from the starting nine through pinch-hitting choices – enriches the viewing experience for fans and analysts alike. This strategic approach is yet another reason why the Dodgers remain a model franchise and perennial MLB powerhouse.