

The Los Angeles Dodgers have long been lauded for their bullpen talent, and on paper, the 2024 relief corps continues that tradition with a stacked mix of experience, velocity, and versatility. Yet despite the apparent depth, savvy fans and analysts understand that bullpen availability can be a precarious balancing act. Talent alone doesn't guarantee the Dodgers a fresh and reliable bullpen for every single game, especially against elite opponents or grueling stretches.

In this deep dive, we explore why the Dodgers' bullpen, while impressive on paper, can still feel thin for one night. We'll highlight key nuances including confirmed vs probable starters, starter workloads, lineup construction, platoon matchups, and how trusted leverage arms are typically distributed. We'll also leverage insights from real-time odds via Oddstrader and MLB.com updates, such as Shohei Ohtani's expected return on September 23, which invariably impacts roster decisions and bullpen usage.

Confirmed Starter vs. Probable Starter: Why It Matters for Bullpen Usage

One common oversight when evaluating bullpen strength is to look purely at the starting pitcher's name without considering whether they are the confirmed starter for that night or just a probable starter. This distinction dramatically changes bullpen expectations.

- **Confirmed Starter:** The pitcher is locked in and expected to take the mound, allowing the Dodgers to plan bullpen usage around their typical workload and historical pitch counts.
- **Probable Starter:** This pitcher might start barring an unforeseen change. In cases where there's uncertainty, the bullpen must be ready for multiple contingencies—early hooks, extra innings, or even tandem starts.

For example, if a confirmed starter is a workhorse like Dustin May or Julio Urías, the Dodgers might anticipate a longer outing, thus limiting bullpen reliance early on. But if the starter is a rookie or coming off injury, as sometimes listed on sites like MLB.com leading up to game day, the bullpen platoon depth suddenly becomes more critical.

Starter Workload and Pitch Count: The Real Bullpen Usage Drivers

Never underestimate how the traditional and modern approach to pitcher workloads influences bullpen availability. Pitch counts and innings pitched give vital context beyond just the number of runs allowed.

Starter	Innings Pitched	Total Pitches	Effect on Bullpen
Dustin May	6.2	95	Bullpen can be limited to 2-3 innings
Julio Urías	7.1	105	Minimal bullpen use expected
Probable Starter (e.g., rookie)	4.0	75+	Increased bullpen usage, especially early

A higher pitch count or earlier exit means the bullpen must cover more innings, sometimes exhausting even the deepest bullpen resources. This workload distribution remains a key factor explaining the "thin" feeling despite perceived talent.

Lineup Construction and Rest Days: Managing Fatigue and Availability

It's not just the pitchers—bullpen deployment hinges on the lineup construction and the manager's planned rest days for both starters and key relievers. For instance:

- **Back-to-back games:** Pitchers who worked late innings the previous day often need rest, reducing bullpen availability on a given night.
- **Handedness-based platoons:** Managers rest certain lefty specialists based on upcoming opponent lineups.
- **Resting trusted arms:** High-leverage relievers (like Edwin Uceta, Blake Treinen) only pitch on regular rest to maintain effectiveness.

As MLB.com notes, the Dodgers' lineup changes rapidly with factors like Shohei Ohtani's return on September 23 influencing rest strategies. The upcoming stretch featuring an Ohtani-led Angels offense will likely force the Dodgers to carefully allocate bullpen usage, especially given Ohtani's ability to hit left and right-handed pitchers effectively.

Platoon Splits and Handedness: Depth Isn't Just Relative to Talent but Matchups

One of the greatest challenges for any bullpen—even one as talented as the Dodgers'—is balancing platoon splits and handedness. A bullpen heavy with right-handed arms might look impressive on **website** paper, but if the opposing lineup is stacked with left-handed hitters, those "great arms" suddenly become less effective. Conversely, having flexible relievers who can pitch against both lefties and righties is invaluable but rare.

The Dodgers generally employ a mixture of:

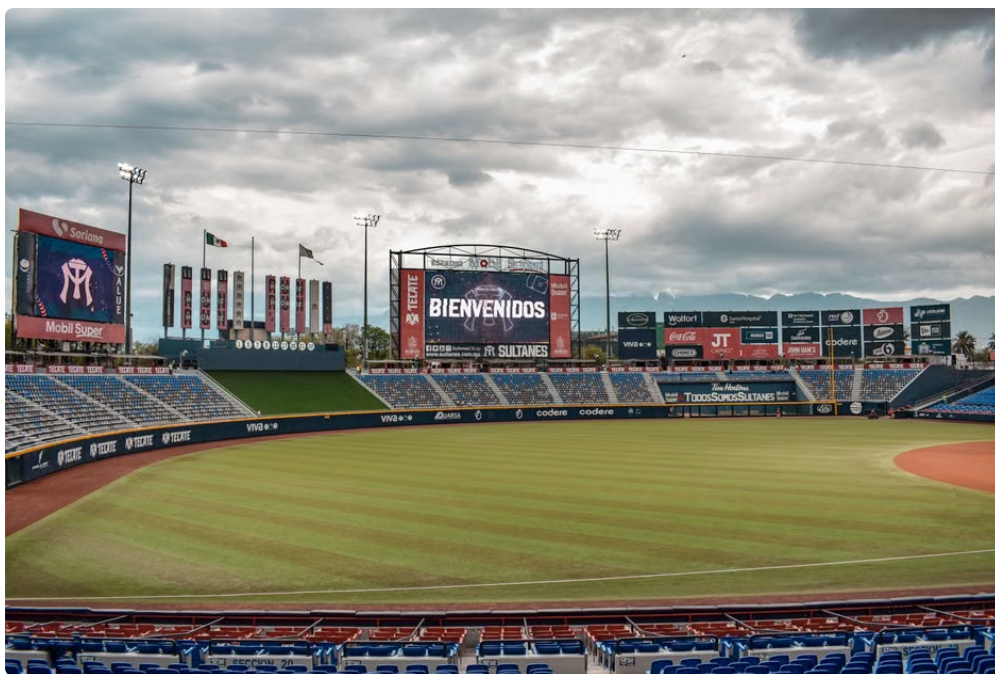
- Right-handed specialists for tough right-handed batters
- Left-handed specialists for key lefty hitters
- Multi-inning versatile arms for late-inning coverage across matchups

For example, assume the Dodgers face a team primarily stacking their lineup with left-handed bats (a scenario flagged by real-time odds on Oddstrader). In this case, even a talented bullpen loaded with righty power arms can feel thin. This does not mean lack of talent, but a lack of the right talent for the moment, reinforcing the need for strategic bullpen allocation.



Trusted Leverage Arms: The Keystone to Bullpen Durability

Every bullpen has trusted arms who serve as the keystone during high-pressure moments: setup men, closers, and key multi-inning relievers. These pitchers are preserved carefully by Dodgers' management given their role in late-inning, high-leverage situations.



- **Leverage allocation:** Managers avoid over-using these arms to prevent fatigue and maintain effectiveness.
- **Backups:** Once trusted arms need rest, backups or inexperienced relievers must fill the gap, making the bullpen feel thin temporarily.
- **Performance fluctuations:** Even the best closers and setup men have off days or injury hiccups, which reduces the bullpen's strength instantly.

Consequently, even with overall great bullpen talent, the nightly "availability vs talent" balance can tilt toward thinness when these trusted arms require rest or fail to perform.

Summing It Up: The Rubric Behind the Roster

It's crucial to remember the Dodgers' bullpen isn't just a roster of talent; it's a dynamic ecosystem heavily influenced by:

1. **Starter confirmation and expected workload** (confirmed starters allow better bullpen planning)
2. **Pitch count history and recent usage** (high pitch counts reduce bullpen overuse risk)
3. **Lineup construction and rest strategy** (managing daily usage deliberately)
4. **Platoon splits and handedness matchups on the fly** (needing the right matchup arms)
5. **Trusted leverage arms and their availability** (who can handle pressure innings consistently)

This holistic lens illuminates why a bullpen that looks rock-solid on paper can still feel stretched for one night. As the Dodgers gear up for September's tense division races and potential postseason pivots—with updates like Shohei Ohtani's return bolstering rival lineups—the intricacies of bullpen management become even more critical.

Bonus: What Oddstrader and MLB.com Updates Add to the Picture

Tools like Oddstrader provide bettors and fans real-time offshore odds that often reflect underlying bullpen strengths and weaknesses, especially on bullpen-influenced outcomes like run lines and total runs scored. Meanwhile, MLB.com updates, such as the confirmation of Ohtani's expected return date, alert fans and analysts to strategic roster decisions that impact bullpen usage indirectly through lineup and matchup shifts.

Final Thoughts

The Los Angeles Dodgers continue to boast one of baseball's deepest bullpens, but the nuances of baseball management mean no bullpen can be perfectly deep every night. Accounting for workload distribution, confirmed starters, matchup considerations, and trusted arms' availability provides a fuller understanding of bullpen strength beyond static talent evaluations.

Next time you look at the Dodgers' bullpen on paper and wonder why "it can feel thin" on game day, remember: talent is necessary but not sufficient. The Dodgers' bullpen health is a living puzzle, creatively managed through daily choices, and that's what makes following their games—and their bullpen usage—so compelling.