

Brett Lawrie's learning experience continues, Blue Jays lose to Angels 4-3

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TORONTO – Twice, [Brett Lawrie](#) could have changed the outcome of Thursday night's 4-3 loss to the [Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim](#) for the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) with one swing of the bat.

Both situations played out exactly the same way: With two outs and no runners on and the Blue Jays down by one, [Jose Reyes](#) hit a double and [Munenori Kawasaki](#) walked, giving Lawrie an opportunity to, at the very least, drive in a run to tie the game.

Both times he swung through a mid-90s fastball, in the seventh to end the inning and again in the ninth to end the game.

Over the two at-bats, the one in the seventh coming against right-hander [Michael Kohn](#) and in the ninth against right-hander [Ernesto Frieri](#), Lawrie saw a total of 12 pitches – two breaking balls and 10 fastballs – but two of those pitches stand out from the rest – the ones that ended each at-bat.

Kohn and Frieri both challenged Lawrie with [a high fastball on the inner half](#) of the plate. The pitcher won each time. The Angels won the game.

After posting a slash line of .346/.397/.495 for a team-best fWAR of 1.1 over 29 games in August, September has seen a return of an unbecoming trend for Lawrie.

In 213 plate appearances heading into August, he struck out 21.1% of the time. In 117 plate appearances in August his strikeout rate was down to 6%. So far in 10 games and 42 PA's in September, his strikeout rate is back up to 21.4%. While there's always risk when dealing with small sample size, and a 6% strikeout rate is unsustainable over the course of a full season, especially for a player like Lawrie who doesn't walk very much (career BB rate of 6.8%), it did show that for at least a month, the 23-year-old was being more selective at the plate and reaped the rewards for it offensively.

"Well, I mean that's baseball. He had a tremendous August and he was bound to cool off," said manager John Gibbons. "Can he slow it down and relax? Then it'll be fine. He's playing tremendous defence, that's a given, that will always be there but offensively that's a key for him."

In a sports landscape where there's little patience for nuance (or patience), Lawrie has experienced both extremes of the spectrum during his short big-league career.

The dazzling six-week cameo introduction at the end of 2011 and August of this season being the high points; the significant time missed with injuries and criticism of his "maturity" as the lows.

Lawrie's struggles at the plate came down to chasing outside pitches and failing to drive inside fastballs on a consistent basis. When Lawrie is on top of his game at the plate, he's laying off the pitches away and driving fastballs into the gap the other way. That's what he did in August while also playing outstanding defence at third base.

It's been a long and tiresome season for anyone around this Blue Jays club and Lawrie has endured what might feel like two seasons while playing just over half of one.

He injured his ribs the day before Canada's first game at the World Baseball Classic, forcing him to miss the tournament and spring training. He was rushed back when Reyes was injured two weeks in and it was clear that he was not ready to be back on the field. Six weeks later he was out injured again, this time it was a sprained ankle, and he wouldn't return until just before the All-Star break. Now add the grand six-game experiment at second base when he came back from that ankle injury... it's been a long season indeed.

There have been lessons learned however, there are reasons we saw a better Brett Lawrie in August. The truth lies in the numbers, and Thursday night showed, there's still room to grow.

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