



SF Giants Press Clips Wednesday, May 9, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants strike out again in Philadelphia
Henry Schulman

PHILADELPHIA — The unmistakable whiff of whiffs wafted through the cool spring air at Citizens Bank Ballpark on Tuesday night.

The Giants struck out 17 times in a 4-2 loss to the Phillies, which gave them consecutive defeats for the first time in more than three weeks.

Only once in the first 60 seasons of San Francisco Giants baseball had they struck out that many times in a nine-inning game, and it took Sandy Koufax to do it in 1959. This year, Giants hitters already have two 17-strikeout regulation games.

For the second night in a row, a Phillies starter established his career high, Zach Eflin with nine on Monday and Aaron Nola with 12 on Tuesday.

The way Nola threw he could have notched a dozen strikeouts against many teams. Still, the Giants are proving to be a good mark for pitchers with swing-and-miss stuff.

Even before Tuesday night's game the Giants had the fourth most strikeouts in the league (320). Last year they had the second fewest (1,204).

Nola elicited 26 swings and misses in seven innings, the sixth time a starter has recorded at least 15 in a game against the Giants. The Giants were so victimized just 12 times last season.

Rising strikeouts has been a game-wide trend the Giants had managed to avoid. It comes with bigger swings and more upper-cutting in a homer-happy era, and a seemingly endless supply of relievers who throw 95 mph. Also, the art of shortening up with two strikes is going the way of the rotary phone.

“It’s a little bit surprising, as many strikeouts as we’ve had,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “We’ve run into some very well-pitched games against us here. Both starters had good stuff and were hitting their spots.”

Nola lowered his ERA to 2.05 in his 12-strikeout effort. Reliever Edubray Ramos struck out two, Tommy Hunter one and Hector Neris two in earning his seventh save.

The obvious question surrounding the Giants’ increase in strikeouts is, why? Has there been a shift in philosophy toward bigger swings, as in the rest of the majors?

“It’s not like there have been meetings saying we should go at it differently,” catcher Buster Posey said after he struck out twice in four at-bats.

The personnel is different, and the three new hitters — Evan Longoria, Austin Jackson and Andrew McCutchen — are among five Giants who have struck out at least 30 times. Brandon Crawford and Brandon Belt are the others.

Jackson, who fanned in all three at-bats Tuesday, leads the team with 35 strikeouts in 85 at-bats.

Homers have been their ally, but not in two losses here that ensured the end of their series win streak at five. The Phillies have out-homered the Giants 7-1. Pablo Sandoval hit his first career pinch homer in the eighth inning Tuesday with the Giants down 4-1.

Derek Holland allowed solo homers by Aaron Altherr and Jorge Alfaro, who were hitting .205 and .215 respectively, on curveballs. Holland found by reviewing video that he was slowing his delivery on offspeed pitches, a “tell” that Phillies hitters might have used to their advantage.

Holland allowed three runs in five innings. Cory Gearrin started the sixth and gave up Philly’s only cheap homer of the series, a Carlos Santana flyball that caught the front of the right-field bleachers.

As always, Holland took the blame despite the Giants’ inability to produce runs.

“If anything we’ve got to point fingers at me,” he said. “It’s the home runs that cost us.”

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants’ Cueto reveals he pitched in ‘unbearable’ pain
Henry Schulman

PHILADELPHIA — No matter how optimistic a person tries to be, the mind usually steers you to the darkest place. Johnny Cueto is no different. When he visited Dr. James Andrews on Monday he was steeling himself for a Tommy John surgery recommendation.

“Yes, I had thought about it,” Cueto said Tuesday through translator Erwin Higueros. “Mentally I was ready that I was going to be off this year. I feel relieved. My family is happy. I’m happy. I can see my teammates are happy that I’m not going to have Tommy John surgery.”

Cueto revealed he was pitching in “constant” pain this season, which led to earlier-than-usual exits from his starts. The Giants knew about the pain, but he wanted to keep pitching, as many do with some discomfort.

Cueto finally cried uncle when the pain became “unbearable,” he said. Even then, Cueto offered to throw one more time in Atlanta before his trip to Dr. Andrews in Florida.

By then, the Giants already had an MRI exam that showed damage to the ulnar collateral ligament, so they could not risk it. Dr. Andrews delivered his recommendation of rehab over surgery after ordering a contrast MRI on Monday morning.

The Giants and Cueto are confident that through healing and strengthening the arm Cueto can return and pitch pain-free in six to eight weeks without needing surgery later.

“He’s the best in the business,” Cueto said, referring to Dr. Andrews. “I have to trust him.”

While Cueto already has begun workouts to keep the rest of his body strong, trainer Dave Groeschner said Cueto will rest the arm for about two weeks, “then step it up from there.”

Nobody was ready to say how soon Cueto can play catch.

“He’s pitched a lot of innings,” Groeschner said. “There’s a lot of wear and tear. There’s a good chance it’s going to get better. That’s why we’re going through with the rehab.”

Briefly: The Giants sent reliever D.J. Snelten to Triple-A Sacramento after he threw 54 pitches Monday. They promoted Derek Law to add a fresher arm to the bullpen. ... The injury bug has crept to Sacramento. Reliever Roberto Gomez is out for several weeks with a shoulder impingement. ... Gregor Blanco was picked off in the fifth inning Tuesday after having an earlier “out” call on a pickoff throw reversed on video review. The Giants lead the majors with six runners picked off. “That’s something we will address,” manager Bruce Bochy said. ... The Giants have gone three games without homering just once this season. They were on the verge of doing it again until Pablo Sandoval homered in the eighth.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants not only NL West team banged up; suddenly, division’s up for grabs

John Shea

Madison Bumgarner and Jeff Samardzija and Mark Melancon and Johnny Cueto and Hunter

Pence and Mac Williamson and Joe Panik and Johnny Cueto again. One by one, key players were knocked off the Giants' roster due to injuries.

Thanks to the unpredictability and weirdness of baseball, the Giants are seven games better than last year at this point (19-17 vs. 12-24), and the thought of reaching the playoffs isn't totally unreasonable, which normally would sound odd considering the absences of these players in the wake of a 98-loss season.

Until realizing the Dodgers are in worse shape.

When the Dodgers arrived in San Francisco on April 28 for the start of a three-city trip, Clayton Kershaw, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Corey Seager and Yasiel Puig all were active. Now all are on the disabled list, joining team leader Justin Turner.

The Dodgers anticipated winning their sixth straight National League West title, but they're a shell of their pennant-winning selves and far closer to the cellar than first place. They went 23-10 when Kershaw was lost to a back injury last season, but that's when they got more from Cody Bellinger, who's still seeking his 2017 swing, and Kenley Jansen, who's still seeking his 2017 fastball.

It's not just the Giants and Dodgers. The Diamondbacks, who lead the division (and league) despite J.D. Martinez free-agenting his way to Boston, are missing Robbie Ray, Taijuan Walker and Jake Lamb due to injuries, and the mighty Paul Goldschmidt has been in a funk all season.

It's not a recipe for success, but that's the absurd state of the division, which suddenly is up for grabs. Perhaps the healthiest team wins, and the healthiest so far has been the Rockies; DJ LeMahieu was back from the DL Tuesday.

Not to be left out, the last-place Padres are without Wil Myers, but this could turn into a four-team race with injuries to significant players determining the division's outcome. No team can use injuries as an excuse because sick bay is overflowing everywhere.

The champion could be the team with the depth and resolve to overcome the injuries and take advantage once those who are hurt return the field. Until further notice, the Dodgers' streak of consecutive division titles is jeopardy.

San Francisco Chronicle

Want to watch Thursday's Giants game? You'll need a Facebook account.

Bruce Jenkins

Message to Giants fans: Good luck trying to watch a telecast of Thursday's 10 a.m. game from Philadelphia. If you don't have a Facebook account, you're out of luck.

Before the season, Major League Baseball thought it would be a good idea to broadcast

weekday afternoon games through social media, largely to help broaden its market internationally. It set up an arrangement with Facebook to broadcast a game each week throughout the season, 25 in all.

And it is a good idea; digital production is the wave of the future. In recent years, the NFL has live-streamed Thursday Night Football games through Twitter and Amazon.

The big difference here: It's a monopoly. None of the TV or cable channels that normally air Giants games will show the contest Thursday. If you paid for MLB Extra Innings, the outlet that broadcasts all of the games, forget it. Online only.

I've received nearly 100 responses since I provided this information on Twitter, and a lot of digital-wise fans don't understand all the commotion. If you have a Facebook account, you can watch the game on a Smart TV with your Facebook app. "Get with it," they say.

Well, that's a very rude dismissal of people who haven't quite joined the modern age — and never will. There are thousands of Giants fans who rarely use the internet, let alone Facebook, and look forward to watching on television sets. And they live for these telecasts; it's the highlight of their day or evening. I guess in commissioner Rob Manfred's world, these people don't matter.

MLB's deal with Facebook was also signed before the tech giant's data scandal with Cambridge Analytica broke, spurring a movement for users to delete their Facebook accounts.

It's nothing short of baffling that MLB won't at least allow local telecasts — in Thursday's case, in the Philadelphia and San Francisco markets. Given that the online audiences for the recent Phillies-Mets and Cardinals-Brewers games peaked around 75,000, the viewership would increase dramatically.

What's good about this Facebook arrangement? No commercials on the broadcast; that's about it. Javier Lopez will be part of the Giants' Thursday broadcast, but not Duane Kuiper, who will work radio only (Mike Krukow isn't on this road trip). And from what I hear, viewers are highly upset over the inclusion of viewer comments on the screen — a nod to the interactive crowd.

Here's an assortment of social-media fan reaction:

"Sweet! I've always wanted to watch my baseball games on a 5.7-inch screen — said no one, ever."

"I can't see the game. Too many text balloons."

"The Facebook telecasts have been full of problems. Last week, trying to watch the Dodgers, the picture was fuzzy and the broadcast was constantly delayed. I finally turned it off."

“Yeah, nothing like trying to watch a game on our phone. While doing so, being in a chat room with mediocre commentary. Radio it shall be.”

“This is so wrong on so many levels. I don’t have a Facebook account and surely won’t open one now.”

San Jose Mercury News

Giants streak of five straight series wins ends with another loss to Phillies

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—After a red-hot weekend at the plate that featured a sweep of the Atlanta Braves, the Giants expected their offense to continue carrying the club in a hitter-friendly Citizens Bank Park.

While the ballpark may be forgiving for power hitters, there was nothing friendly about the way Phillies starter Aaron Nola carved up the Giants lineup in a 4-2 defeat.

A night after Zach Eflin set a new career-high with nine strikeouts against the Giants, Nola established his own personal best with 12 punchouts and needed just six innings to achieve the feat. Nola lasted until the seventh, but retired the final three hitters he faced on a lineout and two groundouts.

“A lot of strikeouts tonight,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “That’s unlike us, although we’ve had our little moments. But they’ve been pitching well.”

The Giants whiffed at 26 of the 109 pitches the Philadelphia right-hander threw in a loss that guaranteed San Francisco’s streak of five straight series wins will come to an end. With two games left to go against the Phillies, the best the Giants can do is earn a split.

Three Philadelphia relievers combined for five more strikeouts after Nola exited, as the Giants finished with 17 strikeouts in a game for the second time this season. Prior to 2018, no Giants team had struck out that many times in a nine-inning game since 1959.

“It’s not like there’s been a meeting or anything saying that we should go at it a different way,” Buster Posey said, when asked about the trend of increased strikeouts. “Nola was pretty good tonight, he was throwing a couple of different fastballs and commanding the changeup pretty well.”

Aside from an RBI groundout off the bat of Brandon Crawford in the second inning, the Giants’ offense didn’t threaten the Phillies until the eighth when Pablo Sandoval hit the first pinch hit home run of his career, an opposite field shot to cut the deficit by a run.

A two-out walk allowed Posey to step in the batter’s box representing the game-tying run, but Posey bounced out to third base, snapping a 23-game hit streak against the Phillies that dated

back to July of 2014.

While Nola induced nine swings and misses with a devastating changeup and seven more with a sharp curveball that darted out of the strike zone, Giants left-hander Derek Holland lasted five innings and allowed a pair of solo home runs.

“We got outpitched,” Holland said. “He outdid me and that shouldn’t happen. It’s my fault.”

First-year Phillies manager Gabe Kapler has developed a reputation for a quick hook and an eagerness to turn to the bullpen early in games, but it was Bochy who lifted Holland after the southpaw needed 79 pitches to navigate through five frames.

“I wasn’t tired or anything,” Holland said. “I kind of wish I would have got to go out a little bit longer but Bochy went with the hotter hand and I respect that. I’m always going to respect his decision.”

Holland said both of the home runs he allowed Tuesday came on curveballs. After watching replays of his delivery, the left-hander thinks Phillies hitters were able to anticipate the pitches because he slowed down his throwing motion.

“It’s definitely kind of a tip,” Holland said. “You definitely can see it but at the same time, I’m not throwing (the curveball). It was a lazy pitch.”

With the Giants trailing 3-1 in the sixth, Bochy summoned right-hander Cory Gearrin to replace Holland. First baseman Carlos Santana entered the series with a .169 batting average and three home runs, but he greeted Gearrin with a towering shot into the right field bleachers on the fifth pitch he threw.

After the Phillies unloaded on Giants pitchers Jeff Samardzija and D.J. Snelten for four home runs in an 11-0 blowout win on Monday, San Francisco’s staff served up three additional round-trippers on a night where its hitters struggled to make contact at all.

Nine of the 12 strikeouts Nola recorded were swinging as the Giants suffered through their 17th game this season with at least 10 strikeouts.

“He had three pitches going, a good two-seamer, four-seamer, good breaking ball tonight and used his changeup,” Bochy said. “He was throwing any pitch at any time for strikes and he’s a good pitcher.”

Posey and Jackson were the only position players to strike out multiple times against Nola, but he recorded at least one punchout against every player he faced on Tuesday.

For a team that scored at least nine runs in three of their last four wins, the Giants have mustered just two runs in 18 innings to start their series in Philadelphia.

Careless mistakes once again proved troublesome for the Giants as Jackson committed an error attempting to field a double in the bottom of the third while left fielder Gregor Blanco was picked off first base with two outs in the top of the fifth.

Jackson's bobbled a ball hit by César Hernández which allowed the Phillies second baseman to take third and score on an Odubel Herrera two-out single while Blanco was caught leaning by Nola with Andrew McCutchen at the plate.

Nola nearly picked off Blanco earlier in the at-bat, but a replay review ordered by Kapler didn't provide conclusive evidence to overturn a safe call from first base umpire Pat Hoberg. After McCutchen fell into an 0-2 hole, Nola proved he could be just as effective tossing to first as he could delivering a pitch home.

San Jose Mercury News

Johnny Cueto's 'unbearable pain' and an updated outlook on the Giants rotation

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—When Johnny Cueto walked into the doctor's office on Monday, he was preparing for Tommy John surgery.

The right-hander had pitched with elbow pain he termed "unbearable," and was almost certain the only fix was an operation that would require him to miss the rest of the year and much of next season, too.

Then came the diagnosis from Dr. James Andrews: A sprained elbow.

"I feel relieved," Cueto said through interpreter Erwin Higueros. "My family is happy, I'm happy and I can see that my teammates are happy that I'm not going to have the Tommy John surgery."

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Cueto will miss at least the next six-to-eight weeks as he rests his ailing elbow, and there's a possibility his arm won't heal in the time period the pitcher and his team are hoping it does. But if Cueto is able to return and pitch without the severe pain he endured in his last three starts, the Giants will consider the rehabilitation process a success.

"I had thought about (surgery)," Cueto said. "I was getting myself mentally ready that I was going to be out this year. But I'm going to rehab and just come back stronger."

Cueto received a few opinions and multiple MRIs on his elbow before all parties involved determined that rest and rehab was preferable to surgery. The right-hander is confident the process will work because of the reputation of Andrews, a leading orthopedic surgeon who has

operated on a long list of professional pitchers.

“He’s the best in the business so I have to trust him,” Cueto said. “He did another MRI and it came out okay. His suggestion was to rehab so that’s what I have to do and hopefully I’ll come out stronger.”

Cueto said a forearm injury he dealt with after last year’s All-Star break was unrelated to his elbow sprain, and the last three starts are the first time he’s experienced pain as significant as what he felt.

Though Cueto had posted a 0.84 ERA through five starts before hitting the disabled list, he said he wasn’t able to pitch deeper into games because the pain in his elbow became too intense to continue.

The recovery process from elbow injuries is often fraught with peril, but if all goes well for Cueto, the Giants could have him back shortly before the All-Star break. By that point, the club expects ace Madison Bumgarner to have already made his return from a fractured pinky in his pitching hand that’s sidelined him since the end of spring training.

With No. 3 starter Jeff Samardzija struggling with his command, the Giants will lean heavily on continued progress from Chris Stratton and Ty Blach, two pitchers who began spring training competing for jobs in the starting rotation.

Because the Giants are short on organizational depth in the rotation and in the bullpen, left-handers Derek Holland and Andrew Suárez figure to remain fixtures in the rotation at least until Bumgarner is set to return.

Holland is slated to start Tuesday against Philadelphia and is intent on lowering a 5.70 ERA that’s inflated by first inning blowups he struggled with in his first three outings.

Suárez picked up his first career win on Sunday in Atlanta and could be poised for a bright future if he continues to build off a handful of impressive starts.

With pitching prospect Tyler Beede still sorting out mechanical issues in Triple-A, the Giants were reportedly interested in adding New York Mets veteran Matt Harvey to the roster. Harvey was designated for assignment by the Mets on Friday after his ERA climbed to 7.00, but he was traded to the Cincinnati Reds on Tuesday.

San Francisco might have been interested in adding Harvey if he cleared waivers and became a free agent, but he wasn’t exactly a great fit for the Giants at this juncture of the season.

Harvey refused a Minor League assignment from the Mets before he was designated for assignment, and it’s unlikely the Giants would have trusted him with a starting opportunity without watching Harvey prove himself with a Triple-A start.

The Giants could have looked at Harvey as a reclamation project worth attempting if he agreed to pitch as a reliever, but Harvey isn't the type of player the Giants deemed worthy of surrendering a prospect to add.

Snelten sent down

The Giants optioned left-handed reliever D.J. Snelten to Triple-A Sacramento following Monday's blowout loss. Snelten pitched in relief of Samardzija and allowed six hits and five runs over two innings of work.

After Samardzija threw just four innings, the Giants needed Snelten to eat up as many outs as possible and he threw 54 pitches before finally working through the bottom of the sixth inning.

Snelten returns to a Sacramento River Cats team that's been hit hard by injuries as pitchers Roberto Gomez, Tyler Herb and Steven Okert are all on the disabled list.

That left Pennsylvania native Derek Law as the only healthy reliever the Giants could summon from Triple-A to replace Snelten. Law arrived in the Giants' clubhouse Tuesday and could be one of the first arms manager Bruce Bochy turns to if any of his next three starters struggle early in their respective outings.

MLB.com

Cueto says he was pitching in 'constant' pain

Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- Johnny Cueto revealed that performing in "constant" pain finally prompted him to speak up about his discomfort.

"That's why I was pitching only six innings," said Cueto, who rejoined the Giants on Tuesday -- one day after visiting Dr. James Andrews, the noted orthopedist who recommended six to eight weeks of rest and rehabilitation for the right-hander's ailing elbow.

Cueto, 32, led the Major Leagues with an 0.84 ERA before he was sidelined. However, he lasted six innings in three of his five outings and worked seven in the other two. He made his final appearance before going on the disabled list on April 28, when he yielded two runs and three hits in six innings in San Francisco's 8-3 triumph over the Dodgers.

Speaking through interpreter Erwin Higueros, Cueto expressed his delight at avoiding surgery. If Cueto had a muscle tear, he likely would have needed Tommy John elbow surgery that could have sidelined him for at least a year.

"I feel relief," Cueto said. "My family's happy. I'm happy. I can see my teammates are happy."

Cueto's faith in Dr. Andrews' prognosis was implicit.

"He's the best in the business," Cueto said. "That's why I have to trust him."

Worth noting

- Right-hander Derek Law replaced lefty D.J. Snelten in the Giants' bullpen. Manager Bruce Bochy reasoned that Snelten would need a couple of days' rest after pitching two rigorous innings in Monday's 11-0 loss here (four earned runs and six hits allowed). Law therefore was summoned so the relief corps wouldn't be essentially a man short.

MLB.com

Giants' rally falls short as Nola baffles offense

Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- Maybe the Giants' 4-2 loss Tuesday night to the Phillies was a mere matter of timing, in which they were scheduled to visit Citizens Bank Park when Aaron Nola happened to throw one of the best games of his career.

Or, perhaps the Giants bore witness to something more imposing and electrifying: the legitimizing of a future All-Star, a peer who someday shall become peerless.

Nola dominated the Giants for seven innings, allowing one run and five hits. He struck out nearly half of the batters he faced -- 12 of 25 -- and retired at least one batter on strikes in every inning he worked but the seventh. Just as impressively, he walked none.

Nola, 24, has been around. This was his 68th career start. But with this game, he truly announced his presence to the Giants. From now on, when the Giants see the Phillies on the schedule, they'll wonder whether Nola's pitching, just as they do when they face the Dodgers and grimly await Clayton Kershaw's turn to pitch.

"He was throwing a couple of different fastballs, commanded the changeup pretty well and dropped in breaking balls," Giants catcher Buster Posey said of Nola, who recorded nine consecutive outs on strikeouts from the end of the second inning through the first two outs of the fifth. "Yeah, he was pretty good tonight."

Fabulous as Nola was, the Giants brought the potential tying run to the plate in the eighth inning. After Pablo Sandoval clobbered a pinch-hit homer off Edubray Ramos to narrow the difference to 4-2, Andrew McCutchen drew a two-out walk. Up came Posey, who was 0-for-3 but had hit safely in his last 23 games here. That streak ended, along with the Giants' hopes, when right-hander Tommy Hunter relieved Ramos and coaxed a groundout to third from Posey.

Giants starter Derek Holland continued the Giants' recent tendency to yield the long ball, allowing home runs to Aaron Altherr and Jorge Alfaro. Both came on breaking pitches, which aroused Holland's concern. He suspected that he might have tipped off the hitters to what was

coming by slowing down his delivery

"As the hitter, it's easier to sit back on something like that," Holland said.

Holland (1-4) surrendered three earned runs in five innings for the third time this season. Yet manager Bruce Bochy deciphered improvement from the left-hander.

"I thought he made some really good pitches that could have gone the other way," Bochy said. "Overall, his stuff has picked up."

SOUND SMART

This marks the first time the Giants have lost back-to-back games since April 13-17 (three at San Diego, one at Arizona). But Holland insisted on remaining calm.

"We're going to bounce back," he vowed. "We've shown it."

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

The Giants have committed 11 errors in the first five games of this trip. Tuesday, however, they tightened up their defense. Third baseman Evan Longoria made an impressive diving stop of Carlos Santana's second-inning line drive, and shortstop Brandon Crawford ranged toward the middle of the infield to grab Nola's grounder and start an inning-ending double play in the fourth inning from a difficult angle.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Giants generated such little offense that wasting even the slightest opportunity aroused Bochy's concern. The Phillies thought Nola picked off Gregor Blanco in the fifth inning, but replays proved inconclusive and the call stood. However, Nola legitimately picked off Blanco moments later to end the inning.

"It's something we will address," Bochy said.

UP NEXT

Giants right-hander Chris Stratton, who starts Wednesday's 4:05 p.m. PT contest at Philadelphia, allowed two homers in a game for the first time in his career last Friday at Atlanta yet earned the decision in San Francisco's 9-4 win. Nick Pivetta will start for the Phillies.

NBC Sports Bay Area

In loss to Phillies, Giants continue to pile up the strikeouts

Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA — Bruce Bochy spent all offseason and spring saying the Giants would hit more homers this season, and he was right. The new-look lineup has come with a nasty side effect, though.

The Giants' strikeout rate was up nearly five percent from a year ago entering Tuesday's game. Aaron Nola did nothing to change that tune. Nola struck out a career-high 12 in seven innings and the bullpen rung up five more. The Giants have three games already with at least 17 strikeouts. They never whiffed more than 15 times last season.

"That's a little bit of a surprise, as many strikeouts as we've had," Bochy said. "These last two starters have been tough. They both had great stuff and command."

On Monday, Zach Eflin set his career-high in strikeouts. Nola was on a different level, and a scout in attendance said it was the best stuff he had seen all year, with three "plus-plus" pitches going. The 24-year-old got 26 swinging strikes, the second-most in the majors this season.

"He's been throwing the ball well and he really did tonight," Bochy said.

Derek Holland has not thrown all that well this season, and he gave up two early homers on curveballs. The second one was tucked low and away and it almost looked like Jorge Alfaro knew the pitch was coming. Holland went back and looked at film and felt he was tipping his breaking ball, something he has done in the past by inadvertently slowing down his delivery. He made an adjustment and didn't allow another run, but the Giants made too many mistakes on this night to truly come back.

Austin Jackson bobbled a ball to the wall in the third, allowing Cesar Hernandez to reach third. Alen Hanson couldn't keep Odubel Herrera's bouncer up the middle on the infield. On another night, Holland might have escaped that inning. On this night, it was an easy run for the Phillies.

Then there was the mistake that really seemed to get to Bochy. Gregor Blanco singled with two outs in the fifth but was picked off with Andrew McCutchen at the plate. Blanco had nearly been picked off earlier in the at-bat, but replay showed he was just barely back in ahead of the tag. In a two-run game, the misplays added up. The pickoff was the MLB-leading sixth of the year for Giants runners.

"That's something we will address," Bochy said. "That's too many pickoffs."

It does not sound like the strikeouts have reached that level yet, but it's worth keeping an eye on. Every hitter in the lineup struck out at least once, and Jackson whiffed three times.

"A lot of strikeouts tonight," Bochy said. "That's unlike us, although we've had our moments."

There have been a lot more of those moments this season than in the past.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Giants hang around, but Phillies hang on for win on sloppy night

Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA — The Giants did a lot wrong on Tuesday night. A lot. And yet somehow there they were, sending Buster Posey to the plate as the tying run with two outs in the eighth.

Posey rolled a Tommy Hunter pitch softly to third and the Giants went down quietly in the ninth. They lost 4-2 to the Phillies on a night when they were sloppy defensively and on the bases and did little but whiff at the plate. They've dropped the first two here after sweeping the Braves.

Here are the details...

--- The biggest surprise this season might be how sloppy the defense has been. When Cesar Hernandez hit a double to the wall in the third, Austin Jackson dropped the ball three times, allowing Hernandez to cruise into third. He scored two batters later when Odubel Herrera's grounder up the middle got under Alen Hanson's glove. Hanson isn't known for his defense, but Jackson was brought here to fix the issues in center field. The Giants have 11 errors through the first five games of this trip.

--- A night after Zach Eflin set a new career-high in strikeouts, Aaron Nola did the same. He struck out 12 over seven dominant innings, allowing just a second-inning run on a Brandon Crawford groundout. Nola got 26 swinging strikes. This is becoming a bit of a trend for the Giants. They're up nearly 5 percent from a year ago in strikeout rate.

--- Jackson struck out three times. He has 35 strikeouts in 85 at-bats.

--- With two outs in the fifth, Gregor Blanco on first, and Andrew McCutchen at the plate, Nola made a pickoff throw that was so close that the Phillies challenged the call. They were unsuccessful, but two pitches later, Nola did pick Blanco off. The Giants have had six runners picked off this season, the most in the majors. They had 11 runners picked off all of last season. Here's another area they need to clean up.

--- It could have been worse for Derek Holland. He gave up a couple of homers in the first three innings but managed to get through five. He was charged with three earned on six hits and two walks.

The Athletic

After the Giants struck out 17 times in Philadelphia, it must be asked: are whiffs part of the bargain?

Andrew Baggarly

PHILADELPHIA — For all the endless and breathless possibilities in which a major league plate

appearance can resolve itself, it's strange to think there are but two routes a batter can take.

One is toward first base. The other is back toward the dugout.

(There is a rarely used third option, if you want to be a stickler about it. But let's put events like the Bryce Harper-Hunter Strickland fracas aside for now.)

The trip down the first base line can resemble a sprint or a triumphant trot or an obligatory trudge. But every walk to the dugout is more or less the same: a tight-lipped visage, one leaden foot after another, perhaps a disagreeable head shake toward the umpire, and ears burning with the shame of having just struck out.

The Giants are taking more walks of shame back to the dugout this season. Many, many more.

They struck out 17 times in a 4-2 loss to the Philadelphia Phillies at Citizens Bank Park on Tuesday. It was the second time this season that they struck out 17 times in a nine-inning game. They also oscillated at max cool on April 21 at Anaheim. Prior to that, it hadn't happened to a Giants lineup since 1959, when they crossed paths with Sandy Koufax (18 Ks) in the afternoon shadows at cavernous Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Phillies right-hander Aaron Nola was not Koufax on Tuesday, and neither was the Angels' Garrett Richards and company in last month's whiff fest at the Big A. But Nola is a very good pitcher on his way to an All-Star season, and he established his changeup and breaking ball well enough to keep any major league lineup off balance.

This is the problem, though. The Giants weren't merely off balance. They swung like their Eustachian tubes had been removed.

Nola threw 109 pitches and registered an astounding 26 swings and misses — the second most whiffs that any major league pitcher has recorded in a start this season. (The Mariners' James Paxton generated 31 of them in his start last week, perhaps foreshadowing the no-hitter he would throw Tuesday night in Toronto.)

Go back a solid decade and you'll find only one starting pitcher who generated more swings and misses in a start against the Giants than Nola did Tuesday night. You'll never guess! It's Clayton Kershaw: 30 on June 10, 2016, and 35 on Sept. 2, 2015.

"Really, a lot of strikeouts tonight," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "That's unlike us, although we've had our little moments."

Except these moments are becoming who they are.

As much as the Giants would love to chalk up their cascade of Ks to running into a pitcher on top of his game, this is not a two-night aberration. The overall data shows a clear uptick this

season: a strikeout rate of 24.7 percent, which currently ranks behind the Padres, Phillies and Diamondbacks for the fourth highest among the 15 National League clubs.

That might not sound like a catastrophic ranking, especially when Arizona is off to such a roaring start in the NL West. And true, it's not so grossly above the NL average strikeout rate of 23.0 percent, either.

All of baseball is swinging for the fences, sacrificing the art of choking up with two strikes and living with the consequences. So it's not remarkable merely because the Giants are striking out more often. It's remarkable because the Giants had bucked the trend for so long. And now, in the span of two months, it's caught up to them — and on a night like Tuesday, they choked on its exhaust.

It is a radical departure from what we have become accustomed to seeing from the Giants, in times of milk and honey or dust, for the better part of a decade. Bochy's offensive philosophy could be summed up in four words: "keep the line moving." Presumably, that line didn't begin with a turn back toward the dugout.

Last year, the Giants finished with a strikeout rate of 19.6 percent, which was the second lowest in the NL. They had the lowest rate in 2016 (17.7 percent), the second lowest in '15 (18.8 percent) and the lowest again in '13 and '12.

To find a season in which Giants batters struck out at a higher rate than the NL average, you have to go back to 2009. (But we'll understand if you take a hard pass and keep reading, since that would involve rewatching a lot of Aaron Rowand's at-bats.)

So what's happening here? Is this the bargain the Giants struck by adding more right-handed power potential to their lineup over the winter? Are they simply swinging through pitches that more talented or youthful lineups would pounce upon? Is this a concerning trend that could keep this offense from providing the additional support so vital to a team trying to gut it out while Madison Bumgarner and Johnny Cueto are on the disabled list?

"Sometimes that's the way it goes when you've got some guys with power," third baseman Evan Longoria said. "Trust me, I don't want to strike out. It's the last thing I want to do. And I think that goes for all of us. But you also don't want to sacrifice anything from yourself offensively. I'm not going to try to hit the ball softly on the ground just to not strike out. I'd rather give myself three strikes to try to do damage or hit the ball in the gap or something. So I think that comes with the territory."

Longoria hit a double off Nola in the second inning that keyed the Giants' only run against him. Then Longoria struck out looking and later struck out swinging against closer Hector Neris.

Every Giants player who stood in the batter's box struck out at least once with the exception of Pablo Sandoval, who belted the first pinch-hit homer of his career.

Austin Jackson was 0 for 3 with three strikeouts, and now that he's hitting eighth, the only demotion remaining is to send him to the bench. His 35 strikeouts are the most on the team (in just 85 at-bats) and his strikeout rate has soared from 20.1 percent last year to 36.8 percent this year.

Jackson's strikeouts are not coming with any sort of power tradeoff, either. He doesn't own a home run this season. His .259 slugging percentage is the second lowest (behind Yasiel Puig) among all NL batters with at least 75 plate appearances – and more than 200 points below what he slugged for the Cleveland Indians last season (.482).

It's probably too early for the Giants to pull the ripcord and call up Steven Duggar, who would be a defensive upgrade in center field but is having his own contact issues of late against pitchers in the Pacific Coast League.

Shortstop Brandon Crawford has contributed more than his usual amount of strikeouts to the pile as well (25.8 percent this year from 19.8 percent last year), but is coming off his best series of the season over the weekend at Atlanta. It also should be pointed out that Joe Panik, who was the hardest player to fan in the NL last year, is on the disabled list following surgery to repair a torn thumb ligament.

Brandon Belt is foremost among Giants players who knows he will accept his share of strikeouts, but he is following through on his goal to cut them down this season; his strikeout rate has improved slightly while his K/BB ratio is the best of his career.

He said he doesn't fret about what he sees happening around him in the lineup.

"I'm not concerned about it," Belt said. "I think we've just faced some good pitchers who pitched us well. When you run into guys like that, you'll have a few more strikeouts. But we have a really good lineup and when we get going, we can stay that way for a long time and win a lot of baseball games."

Phillies manager Gabe Kapler echoed those sentiments, saying he didn't scan the Giants lineup and see a herd of wounded antelope.

"When you're throwing out names like McCutchen and Posey and Belt and Longoria, you know you're in for it," Kapler said. "I went through their lineup prior to tonight's game and really their careers, and these are All-Stars and borderline Hall of Famers that they're running out there. So, yeah. This is a tremendous lineup over there and it's pretty impressive to see Noles get some of those swings."

Nola threw his changeup 25 times and generated a remarkable 10 swings and misses. He got six swing throughs on his curve and nine on his four-seam fastball — most of which were in the strike zone, including several down the middle.

“His fastball just has really good ride to it and it seemed I was just underneath the pitches I should have put into play,” Longoria said. “And the last at-bat against him, I got the pitch I was looking for too, and he was just on the corners at the bottom of the zone.

“It seemed even when we were in a good count to hit or got the pitch we were looking for, we were fouling those balls back or swinging and missing. It was two pretty well-pitched games two nights in a row. It’s tough. Offensively, we’ve got to find a way to battle through those games. Try to find ways to create more opportunities. We really had just the one today.”

Longoria’s observation dovetails with the data: by and large, the Giants aren’t striking out because they are chasing. Their 29.3 percent swing rate on pitches outside the zone is identical to last season’s percentage and is actually lower than their rate over the previous nine seasons combined.

There might be no such thing as a strikeout you can feel good about. But Belt said there are definitely ones that bother you less than others.

“If I get myself out, that’s the one I can’t live with,” Belt said. “And if I’m chasing balls outside the zone, it means I got myself out. The pitcher didn’t do that. But for me this year, personally, I want to strike out less because that means I’m doing more of everything else. If I want to elevate my game, that’s a big part of it. And I think I’ve done a pretty good job so far.”

This brings us back to Longoria, and perhaps the weirdest statistical anomaly among the Giants’ lineup regulars thus far: the fact he has 34 strikeouts and has drawn just three walks this season.

Longoria said he doesn’t feel like he’s been offering at balls — indeed, he is swinging at 31.8 percent of pitches outside the zone, his lowest rate since 2015 — and that tells him that pitchers are willing to challenge him. He said the problem is that he isn’t doing enough with those strikes, not that he isn’t drawing walks.

“Yeah, oh, no, no, yeah, I mean, of course,” he said. “It’s definitely something I’m aware of. But I’ve never been a guy who’s walked a ton. I’ve probably had more strikeouts than I’d like versus the walks. But I don’t really feel I’m chasing a whole lot.

“There’s times when I’ve been going bad and had bad at-bats when I’m chasing pitches out of the zone. But there’s been a lot of strikeouts where I had a pitch or two to hit and just fouled them back. It’s not that they’re way wide and I’m swinging at them. Of course, I’d love to draw walks and get on base but I’ve never been a guy who’s gone up looking for a walk, or just tried to work counts into walks. I’d much prefer trying to do damage.

“And it is a product of feeling comfortable. I haven’t had that one prolonged stretch where you’re in a pretty good groove. Obviously, I started out poor and the rest of the time it’s been an ebb and flow. But those are the times when I draw the most walks — when I’m going really well and seeing the ball and laying off the close pitches.

“I’ll continue to work at it. It’s definitely something that I’m aware of. I just don’t want to become passive. I’m trying to move the guys around the bases as much as I can.”

Because when you arrive at first base, the only turns you want to make are left ones.

The Athletic

MLB Draft: A look at the A’s and Giants recent draft history

Melissa Lockard

The average big leaguer takes about four years from draft day to reach the major leagues. College players tend to be on the lower side of that average, while high schoolers tend to take longer. Consequently, it can take three to five years to assess how a team fared in the MLB draft.

With the 2018 draft less than a month away, we take a look back on how the A’s and Giants did in the 2012-2014 drafts to get a better sense of their recent draft history.

2012 Draft

A’s

The A’s had five picks in the first two rounds thanks to the departures of free agents Josh Willingham and David DeJesus. They spent their first three picks on high school position players and their fourth pick on a Division III college catcher. So, how did the A’s fare? Pretty well, as it turns out.

Number of big leaguers: 7

Combined career WAR: 18

Number of players still in the system: 7

Best overall pick: Addison Russell, (1st round, No. 12 overall, 10.5 career WAR)

Best late-round pick: Ryan Dull (32nd round, No. 979 overall, 1.9 career WAR)

The A’s hadn’t used their first pick on a high school player since 2006, when they took Trevor Cahill in the second round (they didn’t have a first-round selection that year). The A’s went heavy into the 2012 prep class, selecting five high school players in the first 10 rounds. Four of those players signed and three have already reached the big leagues (Russell, Daniel Robertson

and Matt Olson), while the fourth is inching closer (B.J. Boyd). The A's also found late-round value with Dull and outfielder Boog Powell (20th round, No. 619 overall), who is back with the A's after being traded away before the 2015 season.

The A's traded Russell and Robertson in separate deals (Russell to the Cubs in 2014 and Robertson to the Rays before the 2015 season). Although the A's haven't benefited directly from the success of Russell with the Cubs or Robertson with the Rays, they have remnants of those deals: Russell netted the A's Jeff Samardzija, who brought them Marcus Semien, Josh Phegley and Chris Bassitt in a later deal, and Robertson (and Powell, who was also in the deal) netted them Ben Zobrist, who the A's later traded for Sean Manaea. The A's also traded Austin House (14th round, No. 439) for the Rule 5 pick they used to select Mark Canha.

Giants

A year ago, this draft would have been viewed very differently than it is today. Although the Giants went with college players for all but one of their top-10 round picks, several of those players are just now starting to make an impact at the big league level, including top pick Chris Stratton and third-round pick Mac Williamson.

Number of big leaguers: 6

Combined career WAR: 11.2

Number of players still in the system: 6

Best overall pick: Matt Duffy, (18th round, No. 568 overall, 6.4 career WAR)

Best late-round pick: Duffy

College-heavy drafts usually produce results a little sooner than the Giants' 2012 class has, but, for the Giants, it's definitely a case of better late than never. Their rotation would be in shambles without 2012 draftmates Stratton and Ty Blach (fifth round, No. 178 overall), and Williamson looks poised to take over as the Giants' everyday left fielder.

The biggest value out of this class was Duffy, who vastly exceeded all expectations in reaching the big leagues by 2014. Duffy was traded to the Rays in the deal that brought back Matt Moore. Duffy missed last season with injuries but is back in the regular playing rotation for Tampa this year.

2013 Draft

A's

The A's had an extra second- and third-round pick, giving them 12 in the first 10 rounds. They used the first pick on a high school outfielder but nine of their remaining 11 top-10 round picks

were used on college players. Once again, the A's had success drafting big leaguers that year, as six of their first seven picks have already reached the major leagues.

Number of big leaguers: 8

Combined career WAR: 1.6

Number of players still in the system: 8

Best overall pick: Ryon Healy (3rd round, No. 100 overall, 3.3 career WAR)

Best late-round find: Jaycob Brugman (17th round, No. 521 overall, -0.3 career WAR)

The A's top pick in 2013 – OF Billy McKinney – was traded to the Cubs in the same deal that sent Russell to Chicago. He made his major league debut this April with the Yankees but suffered a shoulder injury in his second game and is still on the disabled list. Dillon Overton, the A's second pick that year, had Tommy John surgery shortly after the draft. His stuff never returned to what it was in college, but that didn't prevent him from reaching the big leagues in 2016. Chad Pinder (second round, No. 71 overall) and Lou Trivino (11th round, No. 341 overall) are still on the A's roster, while Bobby Wahl (fifth round, No. 161 overall) and Kyle Finnegan (sixth round, No. 191 overall) are in Triple-A but could factor in the A's bullpen by the end of the year.

The A's made a few trades out of this class, but mostly (with the exception of McKinney) when those players no longer were fits on the big league roster. Healy, of course, was dealt to Seattle this offseason for reliever Emilio Pagan and prospect Alexander Campos. It will be a while before we know how that trade turned out. Overton was also traded to Seattle in a minor deal that netted catcher Jason Goldstein, and Brugman went to Baltimore this offseason for right-hander Jake Bray. The A's also lost fourth-round pick Dylan Covey to the White Sox in the 2016 Rule 5 draft.

Giants

The Giants went with two high school position players with their first two picks in 2013 (Christian Arroyo and Ryder Jones) before going back to the college ranks for the remaining eight top-10 round selections. Both Arroyo and Jones have reached the big leagues but neither has found success at that level yet and both are currently in Triple-A. It's a little early to make a definitive call, but, at the moment, it appears this class will produce no above-average major leaguers.

Number of big leaguers: 4

Combined career WAR: -1.7

Number of players still in the system: 9

Best overall pick: Christian Arroyo, (1st round, No. 25 overall, -0.4 career WAR)

Best late-round pick: Dusten Knight (28th round, No. 852 overall)

The Giants' 2013 draft class has failed to live up to expectations thus far. Arroyo and Jones have both disappointed, although both are still young enough to turn around their fortunes at the big league level. The rest from the top-10 rounds has netted just two relievers with minimal big league experience to date — Dan Slania (fifth round, No. 162 overall) and D.J. Snelten (ninth round, No. 282 overall). Third-round pick Chase Johnson had Tommy John surgery last spring. If he makes a full recovery, he still has a chance to be a back-of-the-rotation type starter. Knight hasn't made the big leagues yet, but he pitched well for Triple-A Sacramento last year and recently rejoined the River Cats from Double-A Richmond. He could work his way into the Giants' bullpen at some point this year.

The Giants didn't make many deals with this group, but Arroyo was the main prospect in the deal that netted the Giants Evan Longoria. If Longoria can live up to his contract with the Giants over the next few years, that will be a solid asterisk for this class.

2014 Draft

A's

The A's had no extra picks in this draft, and they went back to their more traditional college-heavy focus in the draft. They grabbed Matt Chapman out of Cal State Fullerton with their first pick and took Daniel Gossett out of Clemson with their second-rounder. Those two are the only players to reach the big leagues so far from this class, although third-round pick Brett Graves is currently on the Marlins' big league disabled list with an oblique strain. He was a Rule 5 pick in December.

Number of big leaguers: 2

Combined career WAR: 4.1

Number of players still in the system: 7

Best overall pick: Matt Chapman (1st round, No. 25 overall, 5 career WAR)

Best late-round find: Brendan McCurry (22nd round, No. 672 overall)

Overall, this class has been disappointing, but Chapman's performance alone might save it. He's already amassed a 5 WAR in less than a year of big league time and looks poised to be a special player in the big leagues. Gossett has struggled in his major league innings but he still has time to establish himself as a big leaguer. Graves should make his major league debut at some point

this year when he recovers from the oblique strain and Heath Fillmyer (fifth round, No. 162 overall) is on the Royals' 40-man roster and is in Triple-A.

The A's didn't make many deals from this class, but Fillmyer was the main piece that the A's sent to Kansas City to get reliever Ryan Buchter this offseason. They also traded McCurry straight up to the Astros for Jed Lowrie before the 2016 season. That deal has worked out well for the A's. McCurry is currently in Triple-A with the Astros and was a non-roster invitee to big league camp this spring.

Giants

The went heavy on college prospects again, spending eight of their 10 picks on collegiate players. Top pick Tyler Beede was projected to move quickly after a strong career at Vanderbilt. It took Beede a bit longer than predicted, but he did reach the big leagues earlier this year. Second pick Aramis Garcia has yet to reach the big leagues, but he was added to the 40-man roster this offseason. The Giants signed only 23 of their 40 picks, a lower than usual number (teams generally bring in around 30 of their picks).

Number of big leaguers: 2

Combined career WAR: 0.1

Number of players still in the system: 12

Best overall pick: Austin Slater, (eighth round, No. 238 overall, 0.1 career WAR)

Best late-round pick: Jordan Johnson (23rd round, No. 688 overall)

If the 2013 draft was poor for the Giants, the 2014 draft was a disaster. Despite going heavy on polished collegiate prospects, the Giants have received minimal impact at the big league level from this class to date. Beede and Slater remain the class' two best hopes for becoming long-time major leaguers. Garcia has talent but has moved slower than expected and is currently struggling in Double-A.

The Giants failed to sign several top-30 round picks, many of whom are playing for other organizations now. While none of them appear to be slam-dunk big leaguers, several would have been contributors in the mid- to upper-levels of the Giants' system, improving the organization's depth chart. The biggest missed signing was 31st-round pick Nick Nelson, a high school pitcher out of Florida who went to the Yankees in the fourth round in 2016 and is now one of their top-30 prospects, according to MLB Pipeline.

The Athletic

As his return nears, Andrew McCutchen mulls his legacy with the Pirates: 'I did what I was supposed to do.'

Rob Biertempfel

PHILADELPHIA — Andrew McCutchen sat alone at his locker in the visitor's clubhouse at Citizens Bank Park on Monday afternoon, casually scrolling through his social media feeds on his phone.

The San Francisco Giants were in the mellow phase of their pregame routine. Jeff Samardzija, who was set to pitch that night against the Philadelphia Phillies, lounged on a nearby couch. Infielder Alen Hanson, a former Pirates prospect who was called up about a week earlier, bobbed his head as he listened to whatever was playing on his bright red headphones.

If McCutchen was still with the Pirates, he would have already squeezed in some work in the indoor batting cage and sat through a video study session before settling in for the detailed scouting meeting that precedes every series opener.

The Pirates are big on analyzing data, plotting and planning. There's always another mandatory meeting in five minutes.

"Here," McCutchen said, smiling as he glanced around the room, "we go just play ball."

McCutchen's life has changed in a lot of ways since Jan. 15, when the Pirates swapped him to the Giants for reliever Kyle Crick, minor league outfielder Bryan Reynolds and \$500,000 worth of international bonus pool space. McCutchen feels the change whenever he gazes at the Golden Gate Bridge on his way to work ("San Francisco is an amazing city," he said) and each time he tracks a fly ball in the treacherous right field at AT&T Park ("Very windy. You can't ever assume a fly ball down the line is going to be foul, because the wind will push it back in.")

On Friday, McCutchen will get a reminder of how his life used to be when the Giants open a three-game series against the Pirates at PNC Park. With his homecoming looming, McCutchen sat down with The Athletic for a 20-minute, one-on-one chat.

Through Monday, Andrew McCutchen had reached base via a hit or a walk in 18 straight games. (Photo credit: Rick Scuteri/USA TODAY Sports)

Well, are you ready to return to Pittsburgh?

McCutchen: I don't have a choice. So, ready or not, here I come. I'm looking forward to it. I'm not the type of person who really... I don't know, I don't think about it too much. I do, but I don't — not until the day of, because I don't want to ruin it for myself. I'd like to just let it happen when I get there. That's how I am about the schedule. I don't even know who we play after Pittsburgh. Do we go home? I don't know. That's the way I live life. I try not to look too far

ahead.

Have you envisioned what it will be like when you take those first couple of steps out of the visitor's dugout at PNC Park?

Not really. Those first couple steps are going to be prior to the game starting, anyway. I'll be warming up, getting ready for the game. Fans will be there. Of course, we hit first, so maybe they won't. I try not to give it too much thought, but I know it's going to be pretty welcoming.

Will you be able to keep your emotions in check?

That's something you can't predict. I've never been in that situation before, so I don't know what to expect. I don't know what my emotions are going to be like. I'm sure I'll have a bunch of emotions and I'll try to keep them in check.

I don't think it'll be any coincidence if the right field seats are sold out for all three games of the series.

That's cool. It's a place that I miss. It's awesome that the fans are going to be there and right field is going to be packed. It's humbling, sure. I'm sure I'll see a lot of familiar faces.

Have you kept tabs on the Pirates — the performance of the team or the mood of the fan base — since you've left?

Not really. I check up on my (former) teammates and see how they're doing every now and then. If I get the chance to watch a game, I will. But other than that, I don't look too much into it.

How much do you keep in touch with your former teammates?

The two guys I talk to the most are J-Hay (Josh Harrison), Sean (Rodríguez). I get random texts from other guys on the team.

Josh Bell sent me a text the other day when they were in Milwaukee. There's a restaurant there called Carnevor. If you eat there (often) enough, you can get your own personal knife with your name on it. I don't know how long it took me to get one, but it took me at least five or six years. They were talking about Josh Bell getting one last year and we were like, 'He'd better not get a knife. He hasn't even been in the league for a full year.' He texted me a picture of his knife with his name engraved on it. I was like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' He joked about that because he knew I'd be a little salty. J-Hay just got his knife this year, too. He's like, 'Dang. I've been here how long?' It's all fun, all laughing. Those relationships don't change just because you're someplace else.

Are Pirates fans justified to be upset by the roster moves, or in some cases lack of moves, over

the past few years?

They had a reason, with everything that transpired in the offseason. At the same time, you realize that's part of it and they're doing a heck of a job over there. They're playing some good ball, and you have to acknowledge that. That team is battling and they're winning more often than not.

I do also understand that there is the other side of me not being there and Gerrit (Cole) not being there. (laughs) Gerrit's doing pretty good, you know, over there in Houston.

I understand. I get it. I get the fans' side. But, you know, it could be a lot worse than what it is this year. They're winning, man. You can't say that they're not trying to win, because (winning) is what they're doing.

What do you think is your legacy? How do you think you fit in the 131-year history of the Pirates franchise?

I think I did what I was supposed to do. I think I accomplished what I wanted to accomplish, as far as, if we put the winning aside, I accomplished a relationship with a lot of people there that goes a long ways. I never wanted to be 'the baseball player,' who, one day when you're not there your name pops up and people are just like, 'Oh, yeah. He was good.' I wanted to be more than that. I wanted to leave a lasting impression to point of, when my name is mentioned, people don't necessarily think of just me, the baseball player. They think of me, the person. That's what I wanted to be remembered as: Andrew McCutchen, the person. A baseball player, yes, but a person as well. I wanted people, if they ever see me, to have stories of an interaction they had with me and not necessarily a walk-off hit or a diving catch. I want to be remembered more for the relationships I had with people. That's what is most important, and I think I did a good job with that.

Until (the trade), I never would have thought about my legacy or whatever. But it did happen and now I have to look back and say, 'OK, who did I do? What things did I accomplish on and off the field?' I hope I'll be remembered as a great person.

A lot of people who follow the team credit you as being a guy who helped save the franchise. When you were drafted and when you broke into the majors, it was a bleak period for the Pirates. How proud are you of that?

Ultimately, you want to win a championship. That's what I wanted to do, of course. Ultimately, you want to be somewhere for your whole career, but that doesn't happen. You have to focus on the positive things that came out of it, and that is one of them — being a part of a franchise that lost, being a part of that losing, and changing it. Instead of the Pirates being kind of a rehabilitation center for players, a place where while they were there they wanted to be somewhere else, it changed into a place they wanted to stay. I think that was the coolest transition. Instead of trading away guys, we were trading for guys and guys wanted to stay. It

was cool to see how that changed the team, the clubhouse and, I think, the city. It was a good period.

Everyone knew it was just a matter of time before you were either traded or left as a free agent. Looking back, is there anything you would've done differently or wish the Pirates had done differently?

I wouldn't have done anything differently. That's just the way that life is. You can't bash the front office because trading me is what the market dictated. The market changes. You have to follow that trend or you're going to be left behind. That's the way of the world.

The Pirates nearly traded you to the Washington Nationals during the winter meetings in December 2016. When that didn't happen, you hung out there as a sort of a dead man walking until the deal with the Giants went down in January. Do you wish the Pirates had pulled the trigger sooner instead of putting you through that waiting game?

Again, I wouldn't have done anything different. It's another year I got to be in Pittsburgh, another year I got to be around my teammates and friends, another year I got to be in my house. I wouldn't change any of those things, regardless of how you felt about it at the time. There's always things that could have been done differently. That's life.

Do you still think of yourself as a yinzer?

(Feigns ignorance) A what?

A yinzer? You know, a Pittsburgher.

I don't know if I ever thought of myself as a yinzer. My roots are in Florida. My home is Fort Meade. That's where I grew up and that's what I'm always going to be. I'm a Florida boy from the beginning to the end. If you're there long enough, you start to feel and people think you're from there. I played there and I love it, but I'm not from Pittsburgh or Pennsylvania.

Your wife, Maria, is from DuBois and you still have a house in the northern suburbs. Are you worried about your baby son, Steel, getting a Pittsburgh accent?

(Laughs) I don't know. He has me and his mom, so he could still have it. You never know.

Will you have a chance to go to any familiar places or do anything in Pittsburgh this weekend?

I won't have time for that. We're going to get in Thursday evening, then we play two night games and a day game, then we're back (in San Francisco). There's not going to be much down time at all.

My family, my parents, my sister and then my wife's side, they'll all be there (at PNC Park).

That's it.

It will be nice to be back in my house for a few days with my wife and my son, just hanging out, before I have to head back West.

It won't surprise you to know there's going to be a tribute video. There's always a tribute video for this kind of thing.

Yeah, of course.

Will that make it feel real or is this all already real?

It's been real, all of it. It's going to be nice being back and I have all of the respect for the Pirates organization, and I know they (have respect) for me as well. The video is going to be nice, I'm sure. And I'm sure the fans are going to be there and the ovation is going to be awesome. After that, it's game on. You've got to treat it like it's any other game, and that's what I'm going to do.

Is there part of you that's been dreading this weekend?

No. You know it's going to come sooner or later. It's sooner than later, now. So, I'm not dreading anything. I keep saying I'm looking forward to it. I just wanted my back to be feeling pretty good before I got there, and that's about it. (Smiles) And it's feeling pretty good right now.