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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants lose to Phillies but avoid the worst with Cueto's elbow

Henry Schulman

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At night, in Philadelphia, the Phillies hit four homers good for 10 runs and routed the Giants 11-0 to end San Francisco's win streak at four games.

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Media: SFChronicle

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games went still against Phillies right-hander Zach Eflin and three of his mates.

"It was just an off night for everybody," manager Bruce Bochy said, "for Shark, for Snelt and the offense."

Samardzija's shakiness over four starts off the disabled list underscore how much the Giants need the big boys of their staff to return.

Madison Bumgarner seems on track for an early June debut. Cueto might follow a few weeks later, which is not what folks around the team expected to hear out of Cueto's trip to Pensacola.

Dr. James Andrews diagnosed Cueto with an elbow sprain not significant enough to warrant surgery and recommended that Cueto strengthen the ligament through rehabilitation. The prognosis for his return is six to eight weeks.

Bochy spoke to head athletic trainer Dave Groeschner, who accompanied Cueto and the pitcher's agent, Bryce Dixon, to Florida. Groeschner told Bochy that Cueto was "ecstatic, excited and pumped" to avoid an Tommy John operation that would have sideline the 32-year-old pitcher for more than a year.

There is one huge caveat. Ulnar-collateral ligament rehabilitation often fails long term and pitchers require the surgery anyway.

Catcher Buster Posey, though happy with the news out of Pensacola, struck a reserved tone.

"You have to be cautiously optimistic because of the sensitivity of the area," Posey said, referring to the UCL. "Everybody reacts differently to rest and rehab. Obviously we're hoping for the best outcome."

Monday's news does not preclude the Giants from investigating fallen Mets pitcher Matt Harvey, who was designated for assignment amid his awful performance on the mound and unwillingness to accept a minor-league assignment.

The Mets are sending signals they feel they can trade Harvey and are willing to pick up most of the roughly \$5 million he is owed for the rest of 2018, after which he becomes a free agent.

In return the Mets would want a decent player. If they can't trade Harvey, he becomes a free agent whom many teams would try to sign for a prorated share of the big-league minimum.

A Harvey acquisition would fit the Giants' modus operandi. They like reclamation projects and feel they have the kind of players who can absorb players with clubhouse issues.

As for Cueto, Bochy said he was optimistic based on the medical reports he heard that his pitcher could avoid surgery despite the pain that dogged him in prior starts.

"It's really remarkable how he was throwing and how well he competed with the elbow soreness, Bochy said. "That says a lot about him."

Cueto feared the worst, according to teammates who spoke to him.

"When I talked to him he was a little down and frustrated that he was going to have to have surgery," Gregor Blanco said. "He wants to fight. He knows the team we have this year. He's a gamer. He wants to win. He wants to be here no matter what."

In other health news, both left fielders have had setbacks.

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San Jose Mercury News

What's behind the Giants' ability to rise above injury plague

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—It's a survival of the fittest in the National League West, but no team expects to be clinging for life in early May.

"We've been hit as hard as anybody," manager Bruce Bochy said. "Our top two guys, your closer, your left fielder, your second baseman. It's just something we're going to have to deal with."

The Dodgers and Diamondbacks have taken hit after hit, but they're in a place the Giants already know well. All three teams are backed into a corner, and just six weeks into the regular season, each franchise is testing the limits of its organizational depth.

"It comes down to depth in your organization," Bochy said. "Hopefully your guys pick it up and our guys have done a great job."

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The Giants sent left-handed pitcher Andrew Suárez to the mound Sunday in Atlanta to make his third career start against a first-place Braves team as right-hander Johnny Cueto prepared for a visit to orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews.

Cueto was placed on the 10-day disabled list with right elbow inflammation on Tuesday, but actually lobbied Bochy to pitch in Atlanta before having his pitching elbow evaluated by a leading specialist.

The Giants hadn't ruled out the possibility that Cueto had a torn UCL, yet the National League ERA leader is so competitive that he was willing to take the mound anyway. On Monday, the Giants received Andrews' diagnosis of Cueto's injury as he has a sprained elbow.

Cueto won't throw for the next few weeks and won't return to the Giants' rotation for six-to-eight weeks, but Bochy said the right-hander was "ecstatic" after the diagnosis knowing that it's possible a more severe injury could have required immediate Tommy John surgery that would have forced him to miss the rest of this season and at least half of next year.

With Cueto out, Suárez earned his first career win and is expected to be a fixture in the rotation at least the next month.

Ace Madison Bumgarner played catch in Philadelphia Monday, but has yet to throw a bullpen and will likely need four-to-five rehab starts before he rejoins the rotation.

With Bumgarner out, left-hander Derek Holland will continue to hold down a spot in the rotation despite a 5.70 ERA. Holland insists he's inching closer to posting stronger numbers, and the Giants will remain hopeful he can do so until the team has its horses back in the stable.

Bochy said having Bumgarner and Cueto return to the rotation this summer should provide a jolt, as the Giants will have the benefit of two fresh arms for the remainder of the season. Cueto's elbow will be monitored closely after he rests and rehabs and the Giants will likely be extremely cautious with the right-hander when he is available to return.

Despite having their top two starters on the shelf, the Giants have won seven of their last eight and four in a row, in large part due to a strong bullpen. Set-up man Tony Watson is in the early stages of building an All-Star candidacy while interim closer Hunter Strickland has recorded eight save in 10 chances.

It's possible closer Mark Melancon will return before both Bumgarner and Cueto, as he'll throw another bullpen Tuesday as he recovers from a right elbow flexor strain. Melancon's bullpen on Saturday left the Giants as optimistic as they've been regarding the right-hander's health, which has been an issue since he signed a four-year, \$62 million contract prior to the 2017 season.

San Francisco wouldn't have taken five series in a row, though, without the help of several position players who have exceeded expectations.

Outfielder Mac Williamson was one of the first Giants to fuel the team's recent offensive success, but he's been out since April 24 with a concussion. Williamson flew ahead of the team to Pittsburgh and will be evaluated by a doctor on Tuesday.

Williamson hit three home runs in his first five games after being called up to replace injured Opening Day left fielder Hunter Pence, who will also remain on the disabled list for the foreseeable future.

Bochy said Pence's rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento was paused as he's still dealing with complications from a sprained thumb. Pence was 6-for-27 with seven strikeouts for the Sacramento River Cats before the Giants decided to give him a breather.

With two left fielders down, reserves Gregor Blanco and Gorkys Hernandez have filled in admirably and set the table for the Giants' run producers.

One of those run producers in Atlanta was fill-in second baseman Alen Hanson, who was called up after Joe Panik was placed on the 10-day disabled list. Panik had surgery to repair a torn UCL in his thumb and won't return until the middle of June, but since he was added to the 40-man roster, Hanson has hit .321 with two home runs and eight RBIs.

After hot streaks from Evan Longoria and Brandon Belt powered the Giants to series wins over the Angels and Nationals, Andrew McCutchen and Brandon Crawford are heating up at the plate and both hitters provided a lift against the Braves over the weekend.

When injuries began to ravage the Giants' depth at the beginning of the 2017 season, San Francisco unraveled and fell into a tailspin that lasted until the bitter end of 98-loss season. Though the club has been tested just as much –if not more so– at the beginning of 2018, Bochy has been thoroughly impressed with the team's resilience and an eagerness to embrace a “next man up” mentality.

“I’ve said this so many times but in order to have a good year, you want to stay as healthy as you can,” Bochy said. “If not, you need to have a nice surprise or two and depth in your system and right now, it’s been working for us.”

Jose Mercury News

Why Johnny Cueto’s elbow will remain a concern for Giants

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—Giants starter Johnny Cueto’s elbow injury isn’t as severe as the club feared.

After spending Monday morning visiting Dr. James Andrews in Pensacola, Florida, Cueto was diagnosed with a right elbow sprain. Giants general manager Bobby Evans said Cueto’s rehab process will take six-to-eight weeks, but a pitcher’s elbow is unpredictable and it’s possible Cueto will have to deal with pain for the rest of the season.

The Giants were concerned Cueto might have a torn UCL in his pitching elbow that could have required Tommy John surgery. However, after multiple doctors reviewed his MRI and offered opinions on potential treatment plans, Cueto will attempt to rest and recover without having his elbow operated on.

Cueto will spend the next two months rehabbing, but if his elbow doesn’t respond as the pitcher hopes, surgery will likely remain an option. A Tommy John surgery to repair a UCL would sideline a starting pitcher for well over a year and put the 2019 season in jeopardy.

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An opt-out clause in Cueto’s contract allowed him to test free agency after the 2017 season, but he elected to remain with the Giants and play out the final four years of his contract. From 2018-2021, Cueto is guaranteed to earn \$84 million, regardless of how much time he spends on the disabled list.

Even if Cueto makes a full recovery and rejoins the Giants’ rotation toward the end of June, the franchise will keep close tabs on the health of his elbow and monitor his workload closely.

Cueto posted a 0.84 ERA in his first five starts of the 2018 season, demonstrating a return to form after a rough 2017 campaign. He missed one start this season due to an ankle sprain, but began feeling pain in his elbow following a start against the Angels on April 22.

The right-hander also missed six weeks after the All-Star break last season with two separate injuries, blisters on his pitching hand and a forearm strain. At 32, Cueto has already logged upward of 1,800 career innings in the Major Leagues.

San Jose Mercury News

Why a tough decision for the Giants could be put on hold

Kerry Crowley

ATLANTA—The Giants have taken five straight series, won six of their last seven and have a chance to secure their first series sweep on Sunday against the Braves.

While the team is performing well on the field, the Giants still have plenty of concerns off of it as a slew of key contributors remain on the disabled list.

One of those players, outfielder Mac Williamson, was expected to return to the lineup this weekend in Atlanta, but manager Bruce Bochy revealed Williamson is still dealing with lingering symptoms from a concussion he suffered on April 24.

Williamson is on the seven-day concussion disabled list, but has missed nearly two weeks of action and may now need a rehab assignment before returning to the 25-man roster.

Bochy said it's "more than likely" that Williamson will play a handful of Minor League games before returning to the Giants outfield, which means the club may not have to make a tough decision regarding its 25-man roster in the immediate future.

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The Giants are carrying 13 pitchers and 12 position players, and with their top two starters on the disabled list, Bochy indicated the team wanted to preserve its pitching depth in the event the Giants' bullpen becomes overworked.

With the way Williamson was hitting before his injury, the Giants also wanted to have his bat back in the lineup as soon as possible. If Williamson was cleared from concussion protocol this weekend, San Francisco either would have had to remove a position player—likely an outfielder—from its roster or drop a pitcher and sacrifice depth in the bullpen.

For the time being, though, that decision has been put on hold as Williamson was still "woozy" on Saturday.

The Giants may soon need to make a decision regarding the future of Hunter Pence, who is on a rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento as he recovers from a sprained thumb. Bochy said the Giants planned to reevaluate Pence's progress after the River Cats' game on Monday, but Pence is struggling against Minor League pitchers.

Pence is 5-for-23 with seven strikeouts with Sacramento and finished Saturday's game 0-for-4 with two strikeouts. The Giants may determine Pence won't be ready to rejoin the Major League team after Monday, but his rehab assignment must end by May 16.

If Williamson's concussion symptoms subside and he finishes a rehab assignment within the next two weeks, the Giants will have a hard time saving 25-man roster spots for both Williamson and Pence. The Giants are paying Pence \$18 million this season and he possesses a full no-trade clause, but Williamson shredded Triple-A pitching and provided a jolt to the Giants offense with three home runs in his first week with the club.

Giants injury updates

Reliever Reyes Moronta exited Saturday's game in the ninth inning with back tightness after entering and throwing eight straight balls. Moronta is day-to-day according to Bochy, and he planned to throw before Sunday's game so the Giants could determine whether he'll be available out of the bullpen.

Closer Mark Melancon is scheduled to throw a bullpen on Monday in Philadelphia after his 20-pitch session on Saturday left the Giants encouraged with his progress. Melancon has been on the disabled list since Opening Day with an elbow injury, but could be ready to return around May 25, which is the first day he's eligible to come off the 60-day disabled list.

Ace Madison Bumgarner won't play catch on Sunday, but he'll resume throwing on Monday. Bumgarner is expected to throw his first bullpen soon and is targeting a return to the Giants' rotation in June.

Starter Johnny Cueto will see Dr. James Andrews in Pensacola, Florida on Monday and receive another opinion on the elbow injury that sent him to the 10-day disabled list this week. The Giants haven't ruled out the possibility of a UCL injury for Cueto, which could mean the right-hander is headed for Tommy John surgery that would sideline him for the rest of the 2018 season and a significant portion of the 2019 season.

If Cueto's injury does require surgery, the Giants can place him on the 60-day disabled list and

free up a 40-man roster spot.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants serve up season-high four runs in sloppy loss to Phillies

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—In a three-game sweep of the Atlanta Braves over the weekend, a shaky Giants defense committed seven errors in a showing that suggested sooner or later, defensive miscues would come back to haunt the club.

The Giants didn't improve make any sudden defensive improvements in a 11-0 loss to the Phillies Monday, but then again, there's no good way to catch a ball hit over the fence.

Philadelphia slugged four home runs in a series-opening blowout including two 420-foot-plus moonshots off Giants starter Jeff Samardzija, who needed 90 pitches to round out four largely ineffective innings of work.

Giants center fielder Gorkys Hernandez nearly did corral Carlos Santana's three-run home run in the bottom of the fifth, but his leaping effort at the fence failed when Santana's blast popped out of Hernandez's glove and landed on the other side of the wall.

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After posting a ridiculously efficient 6.41 strikeout-to-walk ratio last season, a spring training injury snapped Samardzija's rhythm and has prevented him from refining his offerings in regular bullpen sessions.

"We've been limited a little bit with how much we can practice with the way things have been going," Samardzija said. "But feeling good and having the velo back will allow us to get back on schedule with what we're doing and get out there and figure it out."

Samardzija issued back-to-back walks to César Hernández and Rhys Hoskins to open the game before center fielder Odubel Herrera unloaded on a batting practice fastball Samardzija left right over the heart of the plate. Herrera's 424-foot blast was all the offense the Phillies would need to snap the Giants' win streak at four games.

With two outs in the bottom of the fourth, Samardzija served up a 1-1 slider that Hernández crushed into the second deck of right field bleachers at Citizens Bank Park.

“I’ve got to get that slider right, I don’t think there’s any doubt that pitch is a big pitch for me,” Samardzija said. “It has been in my career to pitch that in games and get quick outs and whatever it may be, it’s kind of a utility pitch for me.”

Despite a rough night on the mound for Samardzija, manager Bruce Bochy was encouraged by the return of his starter’s fastball velocity, which dipped early in the year and sat around 95-to-96 miles per hour on Monday.

“He was back to having his normal stuff, velo and everything,” Bochy said. “He’s just got to get his command now. He was pitching without that. He was up a little bit and missing spots.”

Trailing 5-0, Bochy called on rookie D.J. Snelten to relieve Samardzija in the fifth. It didn’t take long for a defensive miscue to burn Snelten as third baseman Evan Longoria made a sensational diving stop to start what could have been a 5-4-3 double play before Longoria threw the ball into right field.

The error was the seventh of the season for Longoria, who is now tied for the second most among Major League third basemen a year after claiming a Gold Glove with Tampa Bay.

The next hitter was Santana, who slammed a first pitch fastball from Snelten to dead center field that Gorkys Hernández couldn’t keep in the park.

“I think he’ll tell you he wished he would have held onto it,” Bochy said. “He’s so good out there and it looked like when he hit the wall, it knocked the ball out but it was a good try. He just couldn’t hang onto it.”

With Madison Bumgarner, Johnny Cueto and closer Mark Melancon all on the disabled list, Samardzija is the highest-paid pitcher on the Giants’ 25-man roster and through four starts, his ERA is sitting at 6.62.

The 11th-year Major League veteran allowed a career-high 30 home runs in 32 starts last season and has given up three in four starts this year. While Samardzija missed the first three weeks of the season with a right pectoral strain, he hasn’t appeared completely comfortable since returning from the disabled list.

The Giants’ offense did little to help the pitching staff Monday, as Phillies right-hander Zach Eflin set a new career-high with nine strikeouts. Eflin’s previous career high in 24 starts was six, which he surpassed by striking out Longoria swinging in the top half of the fourth inning.

Home plate umpire Brian Knight's zone was expansive early in the game which compelled the Giants to chase pitches outside the zone, a strategy that didn't pay dividends. As the Phillies' offense erupted, the Giants failed to have a runner reach third base against Eflin.

Though the Giants will miss 2015 Cy Young Award winner Jake Arrieta this series, San Francisco must contend with budding star Aaron Nola on Tuesday when it sends lefty Derek Holland to the hill.

MLB.com
Samardzija struggles as Giants routed by Phils
Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- It's easy for a ballclub to brush off a lopsided loss such as the 11-0 defeat the Giants endured Monday night at the hands of the Phillies as an aberration, a file-and-forget experience that's inevitable during the long season.

This tough defeat at Citizens Bank Park, however, might have aroused more concern than others. The pitcher who was pounded the most was starter **Jeff Samardzija**, who allowed five runs in four innings. Two of the four hits he yielded were long home runs by **Odubel Herrera**, who smashed a three-run drive in the first inning, and **Cesar Hernandez**, who added a two-run long ball in the fourth.

With injuries sidelining San Francisco's top two starters -- **Madison Bumgarner** and **Johnny Cueto** -- the Giants need Samardzija to rally them with durable, inspiring performances -- the kind he has supplied through much of his career. Instead, Samardzija has compiled a 6.62 ERA in four starts after beginning the season on the disabled list with a strained right pectoral.

- **Cueto has elbow sprain, will miss 6-8 weeks**

Samardzija didn't bear all of the responsibility for what was only the Giants' fourth loss in their last 15 games.

San Francisco had averaged 4.9 runs per game at Citizens Bank Park since 2004, second to only the Mets among National League visitors in that span. Yet Phillies starter Zack Eflin limited the Giants to four hits in 6 2/3 innings.

Overlooked in the Giants' three-game sweep at Atlanta last weekend was their sloppy defense. They were charged with seven errors during that series. They committed three more Monday, increasing their total to 19 in their last 15 games.

MLB.com

Cueto has elbow sprain, will miss 6-8 weeks

Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- Under the circumstances, the Giants received good news Monday when they learned that right-hander **Johnny Cueto** has a sprained throwing elbow that will sideline him for 6-8 weeks, instead of a tear that would require Tommy John surgery and yearlong rehabilitation.

"We got the better of the news," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said before the opener of a four-game series against Philadelphia.

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Cueto and head athletic trainer Dave Groeschner had not yet rejoined the club, but Bochy was aware of the pitcher's mood: "I know he's ecstatic."

This was the definitive judgment on Cueto, who visited noted orthopedist Dr. James Andrews on Monday. Cueto went on the disabled list last week with what was termed as inflammation.

The Giants still must face the reality that they'll be without their pitching staff's co-ace until possibly July. Nevertheless, Giants catcher **Buster Posey** described his reaction as "cautiously optimistic."

"In my experience, everybody seems to respond differently to that type of injury," Posey said. "You just kind of wait and see and hope for the best. The worst thing you can do is say, 'Woe is me.' I feel like we have a good rhythm going as a team right now and hopefully we can keep that."

Left-hander **Madison Bumgarner**, San Francisco's other top starter who fractured his pitching hand March 23, recently began to throw and could return in June.

Cueto was 3-0 with a 0.84 ERA in five starts until he was injured. Bochy reiterated his amazement with Cueto's ability to excel through what could have been increasing physical discomfort. "It says a lot about Johnny's toughness," Bochy said.

Rookie left-hander **Andrew Suarez**, who's occupying Cueto's spot in the rotation, recorded his first Major League win on Sunday at Atlanta and is 1-1 with a 3.06 ERA.

Pence, Williamson updates

The outlook was less encouraging for outfielders **Mac Williamson** and **Hunter Pence**.

Williamson, who went on the disabled list with concussion-type symptoms April 28, will visit concussion specialists in Pittsburgh.

Pence, sidelined since April 20 with a sprained right thumb, was removed from his injury rehabilitation stint, reflecting a stalled recovery.

The Athletic

With their quarter-billion rotation investment looking shaky, giants chase Matt Harvey's faded gold

Andrew Baggarly

PHILADELPHIA — First came the energetic fist pump. Then the moment of confused horror. Then Giants rookie reliever D.J. Snelten bolted like a flushed deer to back up home plate in the fifth inning Monday night.

That is not typically what pitchers do after giving up a home run. Snelten, of course, hadn't realized that Carlos Santana's three-run shot to center had squirted out of Gorkys Hernandez's wall-scaling glove and dropped into the leafy topiaries beyond the center field fence.

Even with Snelten's racquetball goggles, center field was a far sight away. He was still putting it together as Hernandez stirred from his corpse pose on the warning track, demonstrating that the only injury the outfielder sustained on the play was contused pride.

Snelten came alongside catcher Buster Posey. No sound was needed to know the words he formed.

"What happened?"

There was no more appropriate question to ask after the Giants glided through a weekend sweep of the upstart Braves in Atlanta, their fifth consecutive series win, only to have all momentum stopped on a still night with an 11-0 loss to the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park.

What happened was this: Ty Blach, Chris Stratton and Andrew Suarez — the three starting pitchers in Atlanta — are no longer the wet-eared back end of the Giants rotation but the ballast, and it might be some time before the bigger names pulling down bigger salaries become bankable assets again.

There is no better way to rack up series wins and scale up from .500 than to received sustained excellence from your rotation, and the Giants learned quite a bit of news about their starting five on Monday. Nearly all of it was conflicting.

Should they be elated that Johnny Cueto will avoid Tommy John surgery for now? Or keep their

fingers crossed that six to eight weeks of rest and rehab will not merely delay the inevitable?

Should they wring their hands over a night in which Jeff Samardzija began walk-walk-dong, required 40 pitches to record his first three outs and walked off trailing, 5-0, after four innings? Or be encouraged that his fastball velocity tripped the gun at 97 mph again?

Can they keep chewing through so much of their bullpen when injuries and ineffectiveness are wearing down so much of their depth?

The Giants know this and can be encouraged by this: Madison Bumgarner's fractured hand is healing well and he should be calf-roping major league hitters again in four more weeks. But Cueto's elbow is a great unknown. So is Samardzija's ability to establish himself as a consistent winner.

Lesser uncertainties are weighing on minds in the coaches' room and front office, too. Down at Triple-A Sacramento, Roberto Gomez has a shoulder impingement and Derek Law has not pitched well. Josh Osich is rehabbing in Arizona. Tyler Beede isn't ready. Two other pitchers on the 40-man roster, Steven Okert and Tyler Herb, are on the Triple-A disabled list, too. The pool of fresh arms is receding, and the Giants remain thirsty for innings.

So yes, absolutely, they are exploring the possibility of trading for exiled Mets right-hander Matt Harvey, provided the talent cost would be nominal and the portion of his \$5.625 contract they would cover would be at the barest minimum.

The Giants are seen as the frontrunners to complete a deal for Harvey, according to *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal, and it would be a transaction in line with the junk-bond trading reputation that general manager Bobby Evans has established in his short tenure in the role.

Giants officials have done a tremendous amount of homework on Harvey, from what I've been told, and although his well-publicized partying lifestyle and fits of immaturity would appear to raise red flags, the Giants have unearthed nothing that would disqualify the possibility of adding the former staff ace.

Harvey is seen as more of an aloof loner than a troublemaker, and as much as the Giants value character when making player acquisitions, they also have a tremendous amount of confidence in the fiber of their current group and its ability to absorb an iconoclast or two. That's provided a newcomer is willing to apply himself, of course. (And because Harvey will be a free agent after this season, presumably he will be as motivated as they come.)

While it's unlikely that Harvey will ever start an All-Star Game again, it's worth remembering that Bruce Bochy was the National League skipper who tabbed him for that assignment in 2013.

Whether the Giants complete a deal with the Mets or not, the mere fact they are taking a serious run at acquiring Harvey is an acknowledgment that, even though their organizational

depth has served them well to this point, they know they still don't have enough to cover the long haul. Their system still isn't strong enough.

They knew it in 2010 when they sought lightning in a bottle and plucked Pat Burrell off a garbage scow in Tampa Bay. They certainly knew it last year when, while on the road to 98 losses, they put why-not bets on the felt and took on reclamation projects Sam Dyson and Pablo Sandoval.

The Giants believe they have a much better team this season. They plan to finish far better than 64-98. But when you are eager to take on someone like Harvey, you're signaling to all of baseball that you are still scrambling for any toehold of talent.

Sometimes you end up with three days of Dan Uggla. More often, these distressed assets have turned into a viable part of the Giants' portfolio.

While we're on the topic of asset allocation, let's segue to the quarter-billion dollar investment the Giants made barely 2 1/2 years ago: Cueto and Samardzija.

It is a splurge that the Giants can make once a decade, maybe. Three-quarters of major league franchises cannot do it, ever. The Giants knew when they lavished so much cash on two starting pitchers that they were making a massive investment in a position where success hangs by a thread, or the thickness of an ulnar collateral ligament, and where the vagaries of age can be difficult to compensate for those who lack creativity.

Cueto and Samardzija will make \$39 million between them this season. And the next. And the next after that. Cueto is guaranteed \$21 million in 2021, too.

This is why the Giants must nail the No. 2 overall pick they hold in next month's draft, especially if they take a pitching prospect. And it's why they must sluice for gold in streams that haven't glittered in years. They aren't going to spend their way to a sturdy rotation again anytime soon.

For now, they can take solace in Cueto's creativity, along with his tenacity.

It's becoming clear that he has pitched with a grinding elbow for quite some time. Last year's blister issue never seemed to make a whole lot of sense, aside from the injury sounding less fear-inducing when you hold the ability to opt out of your contract.

But you look at what Cueto has done in his last five starts with a throbbing elbow — 3-0 record, 0.69 WHIP, 0.84 ERA, .150 opponent's average, 26 strikeouts in 32 innings, pinpoint fastball command with 93 mph available when he needed to reach back, and a richer pitch mix than devil's food to keep hitters off balance — and you begin to hope the way Bochy is hoping.

That Cueto will be resourceful enough to pick his way through this season. And that his elbow sprain — a partial tear, to be plain — will not rip the rest of the way.

“I was always mentioning rehab, and that’s the way I was thinking and hoping it would go,” Bochy said. “It’s really incredible how well he was throwing the ball. There was nobody throwing the ball better than him. It says a lot about his toughness.”

Bochy described a scene from his office at AT&T Park last week when he sat with Cueto and plotted out how they would publicize the news that the right-hander would go on the disabled list. Cueto knew his barking elbow had become too much to manage in silence. He also knew that there wouldn’t be an opening to see Dr. James Andrews in Pensacola, Florida, until Monday.

So he volunteered to start a game over the weekend against the Braves in Atlanta. To his mind, it didn’t matter. The bad news didn’t exist until he heard it. Why not take the baseball one more time?

Bochy’s discretion trumped Cueto’s valor, of course, and the Giants received what might be best described as hopeful optimism when Dr. Andrews told the right-hander that he could attempt to rehab and avoid the 12-month career death that accompanies Tommy John surgery.

A heady optimist would point out that the Giants could reassemble their rotation in full by July 1 — Bumgarner and Cueto at the top, and perhaps Samardzija back to being a dependable asset again if he can find depth on his slider to offset his heater — and have fresher arms as a result after the All-Star break.

Optimism is admirable. Pragmatism is better.

Because when the next wave knocks you sideways, you have no time to ask what happened.

The Athletic

Giants pitchers contemplate a sad existence without shagging Andrew Baggrly

Giants relief pitcher Cory Gearrin retains a vivid memory of his first moment stepping on a major league field in a major league uniform.

It was before he made his debut on the mound. It was before he even picked up a baseball. It was at AT&T Park. He was a member of the Atlanta Braves.

“A funny thing happened,” he said, “that first time I went to go shag.”

It is a time-honored tradition. A time-consuming one, too. Somebody has to run around and pick up all the balls that get strewn about the yard in batting practice. For as long as Astroturf mats and roll-out cages have existed, pitchers have served as the primary bird dogs. Play catch, then play fetch.

As much as the term might cause our British friends to snicker and snort, shagging is almost as old as the game itself.

That is beginning to change now. The Giants continue their road trip on Monday at Philadelphia, where Phillies manager Gabe Kapler is bringing different ideas to a sport that sure does love its orthodoxy. Among the more radical notions: no, we don't want our multimillion dollar pitchers standing around and bending over to pick up baseballs for an hour each afternoon.

As every major league front office seeks the next great efficiency, Kapler identified what he perceives to be a gigantic waste of time. From the first workout of spring training, he eliminated shagging duty for pitchers. The team is using teenagers from local Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities leagues to help out during BP this season.

Giants bullpen coach Matt Herges knew this was coming. He served the previous two years as the pitching coach for the Dodgers' Triple-A club in Oklahoma City while Kapler was the organization's farm director. Kapler didn't allow Dodgers minor league pitchers to shag during BP, either.

Herges saw the benefits. And he loves that Kapler is bold enough to bring some of his out-of-the-box theories to the big leagues.

"Occasionally a guy would come up and say, 'Hey, I want to get out there today and run around,'" Herges said. "I'd be like, 'OK, I don't know you're doing it, and don't go crazy.' But no, they loved the fact they got their work in and went inside and did what they had to do.

"And it's not screw-off time. It's, 'I'm going to go in and take a nap, I'm going to go in and eat, I'm going to look at scouting reports.' I saw the benefits throughout the season. At the end of the year, guys were still strong."

The Giants aren't likely to follow Kapler's lead. Manager Bruce Bochy said he values the camaraderie that pitchers gain through spending time together outdoors. It's 45 minutes or so when they interact with one another, with no temptation to check their phones or retract into their private worlds. That social connection is important with one another, and also with the fans.

"No, no, you know what? I like my pitchers out here," Bochy said. "It's part of the game. I think it's a good thing. So I don't see myself doing that."

An informal survey of several Giants pitchers resulted in moderate support for the Phillies' approach. None of them would protest if the Giants were to eliminate shagging for pitchers — add it up, after all, and we're talking about close to a week of your life every year standing in cleats under the sun picking up baseballs — but several acknowledged they would miss aspects of it.

Giants left-hander Tony Watson: "I guess you could say I'm not anti-shagging."

Right-hander Chris Stratton: "Naw, I don't think there's anything wrong with shagging."

Left-hander Josh Osich: "I like shagging, but if they told us not to do it, I'd understand."

Left-hander Derek Holland: "Oh, I can do power shagging, too. For a whole 30 seconds."

Yes, there is such a thing as power shagging, and every player knows it when he sees it. Almost every team has a devotee to the craft. The pitchers who power shag do not merely jog after fly balls or scoop them up on the warning track. They fancy themselves as legitimate outfielders, letting their competitive gusto fuel them as they sprint for drives to the gap and sometimes leap at the fence. To steal a teammate's BP homer is the crowning achievement for a power shagger.

Watson recalled that former Pirates teammate Francisco Liriano would routinely power shag the day before his starts. Gearrin said Craig Kimbrel fancied himself a Gold Glove outfielder during their days together with the Braves, and would get his cardio workout through power shagging. Bochy, asked to name greatest power shagger he'd ever seen, did so without hesitation.

"The best was Fernando Valenzuela," Bochy said. "He was unbelievable. He loved baseball, he couldn't wait to get out on the field and if he wasn't pitching, he'd be the first one out there. He loved to shag. He could shag all day."

Osich listed former Giants teammate Javier Lopez as the smoothest shagger he's ever seen, "and he was, like, 40." Holland singled out another veteran reliever, Joe Nathan, for his shagging zeal while with the Texas Rangers.

"A lot of energy for a senior citizen," Holland said. "We had a lot of fun with him. We'd leave a walker out there in the dugout for him. I'd always ask him what it was like playing baseball with Ty Cobb. That sort of thing."

One afternoon in Texas, Holland witnessed the inherent danger of grown men power shagging in close proximity. Keone Kela went full bore after a fly ball and didn't see teammate Shawn Tolleson camped underneath it. The bone-crunching collision didn't result in any disabling injuries, but Tolleson was woozy for a few hours.

The most infamous shagging injury, of course, happened when future Hall of Fame closer Mariano Rivera tried to make a leaping catch at the wall and blew out a knee.

But the most dangerous part of shagging doesn't involve jumping at the track or sprinting in the gap. It's the ball you never see coming. And you are at greatest risk when you're working the bucket.

Stratton was on bucket duty during batting practice at Salem-Keizer in the short-season Pioneer League, standing in shallow center field and taking throws from other pitchers, when a line drive off the bat of Chuckie Jones struck his temple and sent him to the hospital.

“You have a screen there, but the one we had in Salem wasn’t more than 7 feet tall,” Stratton said. “One of those sinking liners can still get you. There’s a lot of ‘head’s up’ going on.”

As Stratton recalled, someone threw a ball short from right field and he ventured from behind the screen to retrieve it. He looked to the BP cage before reaching down. But then another ball rolled near his feet. He reached for the second ball and never saw the line drive coming. In retrospect, he feels fortunate that nobody yelled a warning.

“I probably would’ve turned to look,” he said. “And it would have gotten me in the eye or something.”

Stratton’s concussion ended his season and it took almost a year before his equilibrium began to normalize. Yet he is not an advocate for eliminating the shagging experience. He enjoys being outdoors.

And besides, he doesn’t have to work the bucket anymore. In the minors, it’s the starting pitcher from the previous day. But in the major leagues, the duty usually falls to a bat boy, clubhouse assistant or some other staff member willing to take some ankle-nipping throws for a \$50 tip.

“There is no worst thing about the bucket because I’m not on the damn bucket,” Holland said, smiling. “But yeah, in the minor leagues, the bucket sucked. You can write it: the worst part is that asshole throwing the ball at my shoe. Thank you for always doing that.”

For Osich, that, ahem, individual was Jeremy Affeldt.

“One spring training Affeldt made me do bucket the whole time and he’d purposely throw them short,” Osich said. “Every ball that he got, he’d make me go out and get it.”

Other pitchers enjoy practicing their sinking, two-seam fastballs while firing throws to the poor sap on the bucket. Another favorite pastime: holding a ball along with five or six of your teammates, then throwing them all at once.

“You’re going to blow up a shin,” Gearrin said. “Guaranteed.”

Said Watson: “There’s a reason you won’t see (Madison) Bumgarner or Johnny (Cueto) on the bucket here.”

Major league pitchers are off bucket duty, and now Kapler is taking them off the field entirely. Phillies pitchers have the option to shag at home if they so choose. But they are encouraged to use the extra time as study hall or to power nap – something that club-hired sleep specialists

are trying to get players in several organizations to embrace. The Giants built a “recovery room” off to the side of their home clubhouse for just that purpose.

Barry Bonds was often chided behind his back by teammates for napping in the clubhouse. So was Manny Ramirez. But Kapler told Herges that Manny was a power napper ahead of his time.

“We rebelled against him because you just didn’t do that,” Herges said. “I mean, I fell asleep once in the clubhouse and got my shoe lit on fire. Gregg Olson. Oh yeah. I was on the couch, closed my eyes for a couple seconds and boom! Smelled the burn. It’s just not something you were supposed to do.

“But Gabe told me, ‘You know what? Manny had it right. All the studies show when you wake up from a nap, your alertness goes up. Even your testosterone levels go up. There’s a science behind it.’”

Most Giants pitchers were skeptical about how they would use their bonus time if they didn’t have to shag. On the road, where the schedule is more compressed, they said it might give them extra time to eat and digest before a game. But for the most part, they said they already devote enough time to video and scouting reports.

“And I feel like our coaches are already good at making adjustments,” Gearrin said. “We’ll sometimes come in after one (batting practice) group or we’ll alternate.”

And yet ...

“When we come back to Arizona in June, I promise you,” Gearrin said. “If the roof’s open during BP, there’s not a guy here who’s going to want to be standing around out there.”

There is one other aspect of shagging that pitchers say they would miss: interacting with fans. Gearrin, Holland, Watson and Osich have played catch with kids in the stands during batting practice. Several pitchers mentioned the charms of standing in the outfield at Wrigley as the early arriving bleacher creatures progress from vodka to beer.

“They’re at the bar having Bloody Marys all morning and now they’re onto a cold one and they’re trash talking you at 11 a.m. during BP,” Watson said. “It’s the best.”

There are unusual autograph requests. Holland recalled a time in Texas when a fan tried to get the entire team to sign a hot dog. On the bun or the frank? He didn’t get close enough to tell.

“I just saw it and I’m like, I’m not doing that,” Holland said. “But I’ve signed diapers. That was in a grocery store, though. That didn’t count.”

Mostly, there is time spent with fellow teammates. One year, Nathan lost a bet and had to wear a Tony Romo Dallas Cowboys uniform on the field during BP, complete with the helmet. Holland borrowed it for a few minutes.

“I put it on and took a fly ball off it, which was hilarious,” Holland said. “I said, ‘watch this’ and it hit right off the top of my coconut and shot straight up in the air.”

Then there is the fan that every National League pitcher knows on sight: the guy at AT&T Park who uses a coffee can and makeshift fishing pole to try to scoop up stray baseballs on the warning track.

“Oh yeah, the guy with the can,” Watson said. “He takes forever and he concentrates and holds the line, and he finally gets one — and someone will throw a ball and knock over the can. He’s got to start all over. That happens all the time.”

Some pitchers take the harassment to another level.

“One of my clearest memories of being called up to the big leagues,” Gearrin said. “I run out there to shag and Tim Hudson is there, a bunch of veteran guys. Derek Lowe waits for the guy with the can to collect a baseball. Then he pulled a pair of scissors from his back pocket and he snipped the line. I was like, ‘Wow, this is the big leagues.’”

How sad it would be if those kinds of interactions would be lost. Holland said if he didn’t shag, he would have to find some other time to “catch this cool farmer’s tan.”

Osich pinpointed the most practical aspect of shagging duty.

“Well, Gearrin freakin’ played an inning in left field for us,” Osich said. “We need to go shag because you don’t know. We might need to know how to catch a fly ball, right?”

And while we’re on the subject ...

“You know, we should mix in some reliever batting practice more often, too,” Osich said. “Because, I mean, we do get to bat every once in awhile.”

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Samardzija’s velocity returns, but Phillies knock him out early in ‘off night for everyone Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA — The locals were buzzing Monday afternoon, and not just because the 76ers had a playoff game on deck. The weather in Philadelphia has finally turned, and this city enjoyed some sunshine after a long and cold winter.

Jeff Samardzija enjoyed it, too ... up to a certain point.

After a couple of weeks during which his fastball sat 90-92 mph in the early innings and basically topped out at 94, Samardzija came out firing 96 mph heaters in the first inning at Citizens Bank Park. What was the difference?

“It was a nice night out,” he said. “We were sweating a bit and getting going.”

That was the positive. The negative was that Samardzija had his manager sweating in the first inning, too. Bruce Bochy almost had to pull his starter during a 40-pitch frame that included three walks and a long homer from Odubel Herrera. The velocity is back. The command has disappeared. Samardzija has walked 13 batters in four starts. He walked 14 before the All-Star break last season. He said he needs to work on harnessing the velocity that has returned, and sharpening a slider that often times looked like a flat 90 mph fastball in an 11-0 loss.

“I’ve gotta get that slider right,” he said after lasting just four innings.

Still, the Giants were oddly happy given the blowout score. It’s easier to sharpen your command than it is to throw in the upper 90s, and Samardzija hit 97.3 mph in the third inning, a throwback to prior seasons.

“I was encouraged, really,” Bochy said. “He’s back to having normal stuff, velocity, everything. He’s got to get the command now. He’s been pitching without that and missing spots.”

Coming off a layoff for a shoulder injury, Samardzija admitted that his preparation has been affected. He can’t throw long bullpen sessions to try and tighten certain pitches, so he’ll need to find some other way to bring the slider back.

The Giants will need it, too, given their current state. The news on Johnny Cueto earlier in the day was viewed as a positive and a surprise, but the Giants still will spend the next month without their two best pitchers. They could use a nice run from Samardzija, and they’ll need the full squad to resemble the team from the weekend, not the one from Monday night. The lineup did nothing against Zach Eflin and made three errors in the field. The bullpen was hammered.

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Giants not close to getting Pence or Williamson back

Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA -- The Giants aren't close to getting either of their left fielders back.

Hunter Pence had to push the pause button on his rehab assignment because of continued soreness in his right thumb. Mac Williamson, who seemingly had taken Pence's job, will see a concussion specialist in Pittsburgh this week. Williamson was not with the Giants in Philadelphia.

With Pence and Williamson sidelined, manager Bruce Bochy said he will continue to use a four-man outfield. Alen Hanson and Brandon Belt can also play left as needed. Gregor Blanco was Monday night's starter.

The news is a bit better for the bullpen. Mark Melancon will throw his second bullpen session on Tuesday. He did not report any problems after getting off a mound in Atlanta.

"He came out of the last one feeling good," Bochy said.

Reyes Moronta dealt with a back issue over the weekend but has been cleared to pitch Monday if needed.

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Phillies tee off on Samardzija, put an end to Giants' winning streak

Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA — The Giants knew this road trip would be tougher than it looked when the schedule came out. The young Braves did not live up to the hype, but the young Phillies certainly did.

The first night of a week in Pennsylvania was a disaster, an 11-0 loss that was ugly in all respects. Jeff Samardzija got shelled and had another concerning outing, the bullpen turned the game into a boat race, the lineup couldn't touch Zach Eflin, and the defense was once again shaky.

The loss snapped a four-game winning streak. Here are the particulars ...

--- Samardzija has always had an issue with the long ball, and the Phillies got a couple of loooooong homers in his four innings. In the first, Odubel Herrera followed a couple of walks with a home run that landed in the visiting bullpen in center field. Cesar Hernandez went upper tank in right for a two-run shot in the fourth. Samardzija was charged with five earned on four hits and three walks.

--- There was a bit of good news, though. Samardzija has been sitting 90-92 in the first inning of previous starts but he was up to 96 in the long first inning Monday. He topped out at 97.3 mph with a pitch to Herrera in the third that was easily his fastest of the year. The velocity is back, so he appears to be healthy. Now he just needs to figure out the command.

--- D.J. Snelten, The Big Snelten, had to wear it after Samardzija finished up. Snelten threw 56 pitches out of the bullpen and gave up five runs on a pair of homers. The first was a shot to center by Carlos Santana that landed in Gorkys Hernandez's glove and then popped out and over as he slammed into the padded wall.

--- The Giants made three errors on the night, one each by Brandon Crawford, Evan Longoria and Hernandez. They have 19 errors in their past 15 games. That's not what this team was supposed to be about.

