



SF Giants Press Clips Thursday, August 2, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Johnny Cueto to undergo Tommy John surgery Thursday

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — The Giants on Wednesday announced the inevitable, that starting pitcher Johnny Cueto will undergo Tommy John elbow-reconstruction surgery in Los Angeles on Thursday.

Dr. Neal ElAttrache, the Dodgers' orthopedist and one of the more renowned sports surgeons, will perform the operation at the Kerlan-Jobe Orthopedic Clinic.

Cueto will miss the rest of 2018 and most of 2019, at least. Recovery from the surgery to repair a torn ulnar-collateral ligament takes at least a year. Giants reliever Will Smith required 13 months to recover from the operation.

Cueto, 32, went on the disabled list with a UCL tear May 1. Soon thereafter, he and the organization decided they would try to rehabilitate the injury before resorting to surgery. He was out for more than two months and was ineffective when he returned, allowing 16 runs in 21 innings over four starts.

"There somewhat was an uphill climb when we got the diagnosis a couple or three months ago that he had some issues in the elbow," general manager Bobby Evans said Tuesday. "I don't think we were expecting a whole lot different result" from medical evaluations this week.

Cueto started the 2018 season as one of the majors' best pitchers, with an 0.84 ERA in five starts before he went on the disabled list.

He is three years into a six-year, \$130 million contract, which means if the surgery is successful, he will have two full years remaining, starting in 2020.

San Francisco Chronicle

Win 3. Lose 3. Can Giants break the mold in August?

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — The hype surrounding a very active July trading season in baseball is over, but the Giants' efforts to improve the very definition of a .500 team is not.

The Giants still could use a starting pitcher and a bat. Finding quality additions in August is not easy, because players must clear waivers before they can be moved. Odds are slim, but general manager Bobby Evans pledged to try.

"There's been a whole lot more activity around the trade deadline than we've seen in years past, which lends itself to a belief there still could be more activity in August than we're used to," Evans said. "We're still strategic in our evaluation of our opportunities."

The Giants have won three straight and have an opportunity to help their cause directly with a four-game series against the Diamondbacks, which begins Thursday night with Madison Bumgarner facing a hot Zack Greinke.

The Diamondbacks moved into first place in the National League West on Tuesday night. The Giants, in fourth place, are five games out. It's a deja vu situation. In late June, they entered Chase Field 5½ games behind first-place Arizona and swept a three-game series.

They then went to Coors Field and got swept by Colorado. Win three. Lose three. That's how it's been.

In an 18-10 June and 11-14 July, pitching was the Giants' strength. Entering the final July game, the Giants had the best ERA in the league since June 1 at 3.30.

However, that cannot mask the Giants' need to add an experienced starter, which proved to be the commodity least in supply in July once a couple of name left-handers (J.A. Happ, Cole Hamels) were moved.

Aside from a lack of supply, the Giants were hindered by their desire to stay under the luxury-tax cap and not deplete the farm for rentals.

Without the emergence of Dereck Rodriguez and Andrew Suarez, the injuries to Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija might have forced the front office into an undesirable move.

“We’re in a unique situation because all of a sudden, Rodriguez and Suarez are growing up before our eyes,” executive vice president Brian Sabean said.

Still, projecting their performance in August and September as they surpass their career highs in innings is difficult. Although Rodriguez looks like a bull who will not tire, Suarez has shown a few cracks over his past three starts, allowing 11 earned runs in 162/3 innings.

Chris Stratton, who replaces Cueto in the rotation, started strongly in 2018 only to lose his job and even be sent to Triple-A for a bit of retraining.

Therein lies the Giants’ need to continue searching for another arm, perhaps another Derek Holland type, to pick up some valuable innings.

“We’re always interested, or have an ear toward controllable pitchers,” Sabean said.

The Giants have to look beyond the final two months of 2018 as well because Cueto will be lost for 2019 and Samardzija is a huge question mark. The system offers some possibilities, starting with Shaun Anderson, a 2017 midseason acquisition.

But one can imagine the Giants offering a package of prospects and even big-leaguers down the road to acquire a good starter with more than a year of team control.

Impact deals in August are tough because most of the players who clear waivers and can be traded anywhere either are underperformers or have huge contracts that a claiming team would not want to absorb.

The Giants do have an advantage being in fourth place. They have claiming priority over the other West contenders.

The lineup can use help, too, but hitters are just as hard to find midseason as starters. The Giants and their fans need a little faith that the current lineup somehow can coalesce enough to provide a good pitching staff with adequate support. Make that *lot* of faith, because 109 games of scuffling at the plate is a sample size too large to ignore.

At some point, the Giants also can give Mac Williamson another look and Chris Shaw a first look, but remember, every minor-league call-up inches the team closer to the tax threshold.

The Giants' search for pitching and offense will merge seamlessly into the offseason, when they will have more financial leg room (even with a lot of potential dead money) and the time to engage multiple teams and free agents in seeking the best fit.

All that matters now, though, is that the Giants will throw Bumgarner, Stratton, Suarez and Holland at the first-place club in their division over the next four games, hoping to make a move in the standings that needs to happen quickly.

San Jose Mercury News

Johnny Cueto to undergo season-ending Tommy John surgery

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—His velocity was down, his ERA went up and ultimately the pain in his right elbow was constant.

Despite attempting to treat an early-season elbow sprain without going under the knife, Johnny Cueto was not able to avoid a pitcher's worst nightmare. The right-hander will undergo season-ending Tommy John surgery Thursday at the Kerlin-Jobe Institute in Los Angeles.

Dr. Neal ElAttrache will perform the procedure, which will likely force Cueto to miss most if not all of the 2019 season as well.

"There somewhat was an uphill climb when we got the diagnosis a couple months ago that he had some issues in the elbow," general manager Bobby Evans said Tuesday. "I don't think we were expecting a whole lot different result."

Cueto, 32, went 3-2 with a 3.23 ERA in nine starts this season, but was forced to the disabled list in early May when pain in his right elbow became unbearable. Though orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews recommended a treatment program that initially allowed Cueto to avoid the surgery, the Giants and their highest-compensated pitcher knew the procedure would remain a realistic possibility if his pain persisted.

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After spending more than two months on the disabled list, Cueto returned to the Giants rotation July 5 and made four starts. Following a season-low four-inning stint against the Brewers Saturday, Cueto admitted he felt pain in his elbow after every pitch he threw.

“I want to go out there like a warrior and give my best,” Cueto said after his final outing. “I keep telling you guys and keep telling myself that I’m fine. But in reality I’m not. I just feel sad that I can’t help. It’s very difficult every time I go out there.”

The Giants signed Cueto to a six-year, \$130 million contract prior to the 2016 season to form a one-two punch atop the rotation with left-hander Madison Bumgarner. Though Cueto won 18 games and posted a 2.79 ERA in his first year with the club, he spent a considerable amount of time on the disabled list in 2017 with blister issues and a forearm strain.

The earliest Cueto is likely to return to the mound is next September, but it’s possible he won’t rejoin the Giants until 2020 when he’ll have two years remaining on his deal.

Giants closer Will Smith was the last member of the team to undergo Tommy John surgery, as he damaged the UCL in his pitching elbow last spring. Smith needed 13 months to recover and has a 1.31 ERA in 35 games this season.

With Cueto out, right-hander Chris Stratton is expected to rejoin the Giants rotation and fill in for the final two months of the year. Stratton is 8-6 with a 5.14 ERA in 19 games for the Giants this year.

Evans and vice president of baseball operations Brian Sabean said Tuesday the front office will monitor the waiver wire closely in August and look to add young, controllable pitchers if they find the right opportunities.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants impacting short-term, long-term future with roster decisions in August

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—The trade deadline is baseball’s version of chess, an opportunity for general managers to outsmart one another in an effort to best position their franchises for immediate or future success.

When Giants executives Brian Sabean and Bobby Evans have analyzed their pieces and evaluated options, the front office duo has almost always devised aggressive strategies and often used maneuvers that led to endgame domination.

This year, with a .500 club and long playoff odds in front of them, Sabean and Evans sat down at

the table before standing up to spectate. For the first time since 2013, the Giants did not execute a deadline trade and instead opted to see if their current roster has enough left in the tank to challenge for National League West supremacy.

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What will the next two months look like in San Francisco? Our Giants beat writer, Kerry Crowley, answered readers' questions.

Who are the Giants going after in waivers? (From Saul in San Francisco)

Crowley: It's unclear whether the Giants will look to buy or sell on the waiver wire in the month of August as the team's performance over the next two-to-three weeks will likely dictate the direction the franchise takes.

If the Giants do look to add pieces, expect the front office to pursue starting pitchers, relievers or corner outfielders under team control for the next few seasons. Sabean said the Giants aren't looking at free agents-to-be to help the club and are instead monitoring the market for young starting pitchers.

One name that makes sense is Cincinnati's Matt Harvey, who will assuredly be placed on waivers and could help a starting staff that's been decimated by injuries.

With Johnny Cueto all but gone in 2019, who do you see the Giants bringing in to fill that role? (From Justin in San Mateo)

Crowley: If Johnny Cueto's elbow injury does require Tommy John surgery, the Giants will be forced to consider adding at least one established starting pitcher this offseason. With Dereck Rodríguez and Andrew Suárez under team control for five more years, the Giants will have the financial flexibility to look at veteran free agents like Gio Gonzalez and Patrick Corbin.

However, after watching older pitchers including Matt Cain, Jake Peavy, Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija break down in recent years, the Giants will be motivated to trade for young starters and may be forced to part with top position player prospects to fill the potential void left if Cueto is out for all of next season.

San Francisco should also look to re-sign Derek Holland, who is enjoying his best season in years under the guidance of pitching coach Curt Young.

The Giants stood pat at the deadline. Do you think that's a sign Brian Sabean is testing the team? (From Bob in Hollister)

Crowley: The Giants' quiet deadline is due to a combination of factors, but Sabean did tell reporters it's imperative to continue evaluating the current roster entering another pivotal offseason for the front office.

Contracts for Sabean, Evans and manager Bruce Bochy expire after the 2019 season and the front office needs to see what this current core is capable of over the final two months of the year before determining an offseason strategy. The Giants have dealt with several devastating injuries, but that's a peril of fielding a club loaded with veterans.

With Brandon Belt set to return shortly and Joe Panik ready to resume playing every day, Sabean and Evans are eager to see if a mostly healthy roster can play up to the expectations set in the offseason. If the Giants fall out of the race, the front office will be more compelled to shake up the team before 2019.

Is there a chance Joe Panik will lose his job to Alen Hanson or Chase d'Arnaud? Has he peaked? (From Jan in the Czech Republic)

Panik is hitting under .240 for the second time in three seasons and is once again battling injuries that have kept him out of the lineup for a significant portion of the year. Because he's the only member of the team's core who is still arbitration-eligible, he'll also be viewed as an attractive asset to other clubs if the Giants consider trading him this offseason.

If the Giants do believe acquiring pitching help can be accomplished through an offseason trade, it wouldn't be a surprise to see Panik's name floated in discussions. Hanson is younger and more athletic than Panik and d'Arnaud, and he won't be a free agent until 2023.

Could you see the front office shutting down some of these young arms in the next couple weeks? The Nationals did it with Strasburg while in a playoff race. (From Mike in Sutter, CA)

Though the Giants haven't given any indication they plan on limiting the workload of Andrew Suárez and Dereck Rodríguez in the coming weeks, this will be a topic of conversation if the team falls out of contention.

Suárez threw 155 innings in 2017 and has already logged 124 innings across two levels this year, while Rodríguez is 30 innings shy of his career-high for a minor league season. Both pitchers

look capable of handling increased workloads, but expect the Giants to use off days to their advantage in August and September and allow for additional rest for both pitchers between starts.

What more does pitching prospect Tyler Rogers have to do? (From Christina in San Francisco)

Rogers was the Giants' 10th round pick in 2013 and is on his third season pitching for the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats. He was named an All-Star in each of the past two years and owns a 1.61 ERA in 41 games this season.

The Giants might be skeptical of how Rogers' arsenal will translate to the major leagues because he's a submarine-style pitcher, but at this point, there's absolutely no reason to hold Rogers back in September. If the Giants don't add Rogers to the 40-man roster this offseason, he'll be claimed in the Rule 5 draft and they'll have wasted a chance to see if he can help.

Do you think the Giants will re-sign Madison Bumgarner after his contract is up? (From Andrea in Scottsdale)

Unless the Giants reach an agreement to extend Bumgarner this offseason, this question will loom over the franchise throughout the 2019 season.

It's difficult to envision Bumgarner pitching in any other uniform, and the fan base's love for Bumgarner is something CEO Larry Baer understands well.

Is it financially prudent for the Giants to spend another \$100-plus million on a pitcher with nearly 1,600 innings on his arm? Probably not. But if there's any player the Giants will do it for, Bumgarner is the obvious choice. My gut tells me Bumgarner and Buster Posey will never wear another jersey.

Is there a starting pitcher in Double-A or Triple-A that could be the next Andrew Suárez? (From Joe in San Francisco)

Right-hander Shaun Anderson was acquired in the Eduardo Núñez trade last July and was recently promoted to Triple-A. Like Suárez, the folks who rank prospects aren't obsessed with Anderson, but he clearly has the potential to break into the Giants rotation and help the club as soon as next season.

If the club needs another arm in September, the Giants may even look at Anderson this year.

However, the middle of 2019 appears like a realistic time for Anderson to break into the big leagues.

MLB.com

Cueto to undergo Tommy John surgery

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- What has seemed inevitable became official Wednesday as the Giants announced right-hander **Johnny Cueto** will undergo Tommy John surgery Thursday in Los Angeles.

The procedure, which will be performed by Dr. Neal ElAttrache, is expected to sideline Cueto for approximately one year, likely rendering the Giants' No. 2 starter unavailable until late next season.

San Francisco closer **Will Smith** underwent Tommy John on March 30, 2017, and pitched in his first regular-season Major League game this year on May 2.

Giants general manager Bobby Evans pointed out that Cueto's diligent approach toward physical conditioning lifts hopes for a successful recovery. In recent years, many pitchers have returned from Tommy John surgery feeling as if they had a stronger arm.

"If there's anything we know about Johnny, it's that he's a hard worker," Evans said.

The Giants already have announced that **Chris Stratton** will replace Cueto in the rotation. Stratton was 8-6 with a 4.93 ERA in 18 outings as a full-time starter before he was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento on July 7.

Evans also indicated that San Francisco will continue to monitor the trade market for available starters. The Giants entered Wednesday five games behind first-place Arizona in the National League West standings. They begin a four-game series against the D-backs on Thursday.

Evans expressed confidence in the Giants' ability to continue to compete without the 32-year-old Cueto, a two-time All-Star who was 3-2 with a 3.23 ERA in nine starts this season.

"We've had guys step up all year," Evans said.

Rookies **Andrew Suarez** and **Dereck Rodriguez**, two of San Francisco's most reliable starters,

began the season with Sacramento before ascending to the Majors to stabilize San Francisco's rotation.

Cueto, who owns a 125-85 record with a 3.33 ERA in 292 regular-season starts with the Reds, Royals and Giants, initially appeared headed for an outstanding season. He was 3-0 with an 0.84 ERA and 16 hits allowed in 32 innings spanning five starts before he went on the 10-day disabled list on May 1 with a right elbow sprain. Cueto then consulted renowned orthopedist Dr. James Andrews, who did not recommend the Tommy John procedure at that time. However, following a two-month absence, Cueto went 0-2, 6.86 with 30 hits allowed in 21 innings over four starts. He again went on the DL on Sunday with a right elbow sprain, explaining why Wednesday's announcement came as no surprise.

"Give Johnny credit for the commitment he made to fight through it," Evans said.

MLB.com

**Inbox: Rodriguez-mania, Pablo, Pence, Posey
Chris Haft**

Dereck Rodriguez-mania, if you will, is approaching epidemic proportions among Giants fans. The first portion of this Inbox represents a sampling of the rookie right-hander's growing popularity -- which is keeping pace with his outstanding performance -- in Giants Nation.

Will the Giants be able to hang onto Dereck Rodriguez after 2018?

-- Nancy M., San Mateo, Calif.

Relax. Rodriguez remains under control of the Giants for six more years. He won't be eligible for free agency until after that period.

• **Submit a question to the Giants Inbox**

Will Dereck Rodriguez deservedly win the National League Rookie of the Year Award?

-- Buford B., San Francisco

We addressed this subject in the last Inbox, but it's certainly worth revisiting, particularly since I have a few observations. For Rodriguez to take home the Jackie Robinson Award, as the Rookie of the Year Award is officially known, he would have to significantly outperform the leading position-player candidates. It makes sense that position players would have an edge, since they play every day.

Miami right fielder/third baseman **Brian Anderson** (.286/.357/.422, nine HR, 51 RBIs entering Wednesday) is widely considered a leading candidate. So is Washington outfielder **Juan Soto** (.313/.418/.567, 13 HR, 36 RBIs). San Diego third baseman **Christian Villanueva** (19 HR) could also receive some support based on his power alone.

It'll simply come down to how much the voters (two members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America from each team's city) weigh each candidate's contributions. **Jacob deGrom** of the Mets won the 2014 award with statistics (9-6 record, 2.69 ERA in 22 starts) that might approximate Rodriguez's eventual totals. Rodriguez is currently 5-1 with a 2.59 ERA in 12 appearances, including 10 starts.

Have Rodriguez and Andrew Suarez shown enough to conclude they have a good chance of locking down at least the back end of the rotation for the next couple or few years? And what are the odds that Mark Melancon opts out next year? If he does, where do you see that money being applied?

-- Eric P., Berkeley, Calif.

The *back* end of the rotation? **Johnny Cueto** needs **Tommy John surgery**, and if **Jeff Samardzija**'s return to form remains a painstaking process, the Giants will need Rodriguez and Suarez to help **Madison Bumgarner** anchor the rotation's front end.

Regarding Melancon, there's virtually no chance he'll opt out of his four-year contract, which will pay him \$14 million in each of the next two seasons. Unless some unknown factors are compelling him to leave the Giants, it's inconceivable that he would walk from that kind of money.

Please continue for non-Rodriguez material:

Pablo Sandoval has shown that not only can he switch-hit but can throw equally well with each hand. Why doesn't he switch his glove hand when he plays first base?

-- Jeff O., Elk Grove, Calif.

Remember, Sandoval originally was a catcher. He's more proficient manipulating his glove with his left hand than his right.

Could this be Hunter Pence's last year with the Giants?

-- Phil R., Sonora, Calif.

Unfortunately for Pence and his many fans, he definitely appears to be in his final weeks as a Giant. Plenty of younger, less-experienced outfielders must be given a chance. Moreover,

Pence's contract expires after this season.

What's wrong with Buster Posey? He went from 20 homers and around 100 RBIs a season to 10 and 50. He's on pace for about those numbers this year. This has been going on for the past couple of seasons. Posey went from feared power hitter to a singles hitter who hits in the gap once in a while. Not to mention he's striking out a lot for him.

-- Marc D., Sun City West, Ariz.

My take on it is as follows: Posey never was a power hitter. He always has been an especially accomplished hitter whose line drives occasionally carried out of the ballpark. But to describe him as a true power hitter always was and always will be inaccurate.

I also believe Posey plays with injuries he doesn't publicly disclose. He doesn't want to appear as if he's making excuses. He finally had to acknowledge the hip injury before the All-Star break because one, it was so darned uncomfortable, and two, he had to provide some sort of explanation for skipping the All-Star Game.

Again, this is just my opinion. Posey remains an above-average hitter who opponents respect. That's just my opinion, too.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Johnny Cueto to undergo Tommy John surgery on Thursday

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO -- After months of speculation, the Giants made it official. Johnny Cueto will have Tommy John surgery, ending his 2018 season and putting him on the sidelines for most of the 2019 season.

Cueto will have the procedure on his right elbow on Thursday at the Kerlan-Jobe Clinic in Los Angeles. Dr. Neal ElAttrache will perform the surgery.

Cueto met with team doctors this week and went over another MRI, and the final diagnosis did not come as a surprise. The 32-year-old was shut down after five brilliant starts in April because of pain in his elbow. At the time, Cueto thought he was headed for surgery, but Dr. James Andrews told him he could rest and return to the mound. Cueto made it back for four starts but was never himself, with diminished velocity and unfamiliar results. After four innings Saturday night, the Giants threw in the towel. Cueto admitted afterward that his elbow still bothered him every time he was on the mound.

The recovery time for Tommy John varies, but pitchers generally miss 12 to 14 months even if everything goes well. Cueto is older than most starters who have had it in recent years, but he

also is more creative than just about any pitcher in the game. It's possible he can return down the stretch next year, in September, and find a way to contribute. The more likely scenario may be that he misses all of 2019 and returns at full health in the spring of 2020.

The Giants signed Cueto after the 2015 season and he was one of the best pitchers in baseball the next year. At the time, he looked like a bit of a steal, but there were rumors about Cueto's elbow the offseason he signed, limiting his market, and that trouble resurfaced less than halfway into his six-year, \$130 million deal. The Giants originally thought Cueto might opt out after two years, but a poor and injury-marred season in 2017 made that a non-factor.

Cueto is owed \$21 million next year and each of the following two seasons, with a team option for 2022. Most pitchers these days return to form after reconstructive surgery, but the layoff will cover just about the rest of the guaranteed time on Madison Bumgarner's contract, and it's unclear what the rotation or roster will look like when Cueto is once again capable of leading a rotation.

In the short term, the Giants will slide Chris Stratton into Cueto's rotation spot. Long term, they're looking for other solutions. Vice president of baseball operations Brian Sabean said Tuesday that much of the time before the deadline was spent looking for controllable starting pitching. The Giants feared the worst with Cueto's injury. Those fears have now come true.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

With trade deadline in rear-view mirror, here is what's next for Giants front office

Alex Pavlovic

SAN DIEGO — It had to sting a little when the news popped up on screens in the front office. The Giants took the franchise player out of Pittsburgh in January. Six months later, the Pirates turned around and made a move for Chris Archer, a pitcher who fit the the description Brian Sabean gave when asked about the type of players he was looking for at Tuesday's trade deadline.

The Giants sought controllable players, particularly arms, but they simply didn't have enough to be in on a player like Archer, who is now under Pittsburgh's control through 2021. The Rays got three players back for Archer, including Austin Meadows, a top 50 prospect, and Tyler Glasnow, a former top 20 prospect who still is just 24. There is no equivalent package in the Giants' system, unless you're tossing Joey Bart and Heliot Ramos together and completely mortgaging your future.

The Giants did not intend to do anything to seriously cut into future rosters. They talked Tuesday about competing this year and trying to go on a run over the final two months, but the men in the front office also know what the odds say. FanGraphs has them at about a five

percent chance to make the postseason at this point, with a one percent chance of winning the National League West.

This deadline, then, was just as much about the future as the present. The Giants hoped to replicate a move they made two years ago, when Will Smith was added with three years of team control remaining.

“We wanted to stay clear of free agents to be. We preferred people that were controllable,” Sabean said. “In a perfect world, what we were trying to pursue was a controllable situation that would help us in the present and the future. If it didn’t advantage us in that fashion, we backed off.”

The Giants ultimately did not add for the present or the future, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they’re done. Several players still could get through waivers in August and be dealt, most notably Andrew McCutchen, who was targeted by several contenders before Tuesday’s deadline. Interest in McCutchen was said to be lukewarm, but perhaps that will change in August — he homered in the first game after the deadline — and the Giants will be able to get a prospect or two back for a player they almost certainly will not tag with the \$18 million qualifying offer.

Any waiver moves would be about clearing salary and clearing playing time. A McCutchen trade could clear the way for Austin Slater to get more starts, and for Mac Williamson and Chris Shaw to try and make a mark in September. The Giants still have little clarity on their 2019 outfield. Moving a player like Sam Dyson could open late-inning opportunities for Reyes Moronta and Ray Black, and perhaps the big league staff will finally take a look at Tyler Rogers, who has dominated Triple-A, or give Tyler Beede another shot, this time out of the bullpen.

“This team still needs to be further evaluated as we go into the offseason,” Sabean said.

That process already has been successful in one respect. The Giants were looking for pitching because their No. 2 starter is likely having Tommy John surgery and their No. 3 starter has a persistent shoulder injury, but as they start to think about a 2019 squad, they already have filled two holes. Dereck Rodriguez once again dominated Tuesday and Andrew Suarez has provided a similar boost.

“We’re in a unique situation because all of a sudden we have Rodriguez and Suarez growing before our eyes,” Sabean said.

At some point in September, the club may decide to shut them down because of innings concerns. For now, the rookies will try to keep this team in the race. If that doesn’t happen, Sabean and Bobby Evans will attempt to tweak the roster through the waiver system.

“We’re always looking at opportunities after the deadline,” Evans said. “We try to stay available and transparent with clubs in terms of opportunities. I think there’s been a lot more activity around the trade deadline this year than we’ve seen in years past, which I think lends itself to opportunities in August.”

The Athletic

What could keep Buster Posey out of the Hall of Fame? Not much, but let's take a closer look Eno Sarris

Buster Posey, with a few more healthy years, is a near lock for the Hall of Fame. He's already among the best catchers of all time, and at 30 years old, he figures to have enough good years left to lock it down.

Probably.

While the player himself would prefer not to think about it — “I feel like I'm still pretty young even if it's my eighth year, maybe we'll explore it in I don't know how many years,” was his first response — these days it's preferable for everybody involved with the Giants to look forward and backward. The present is a little too bleak.

Going forward, there are two possible obstacles facing Posey with respect to the Hall of Fame, and neither is injury, nor really in his control. They remain significant roadblocks, though. Maybe naming them will reduce their power and give the accomplished backstop a couple checkboxes on his clipboard.

First, let's establish how close Posey is to making the Hall. For that, we should turn to our foremost Hall statistician, *Sports Illustrated's* Jay Jaffe. Jaffe created a system called JAWS to help compare potential Hall of Famers by peak and total wins above replacement numbers.

By JAWS, Posey is already a season or so away from the average catcher in the Hall, and WAR probably understates his ability to frame pitches, which has been shown to be elite. Jaffe summed it up to me in an email:

“From a JAWS perspective, Posey already has the 10th highest peak score (36.3, 1.9 above the standard) and is still very likely to add to that; anything this year beyond his current 4.1, and any other season above 3.9 WAR will do that. It's not inconceivable he gets up to 6th on the list this year (>37.5) and into the top five next year.”

Jaffe created the peak score to account for the stars that shine bright but don't have the longevity, so you could argue Posey should already be in with a peak score like that. Giants manager Bruce Bochy said something similar before a game recently:

“You have to look at what he's accomplished at such a young age, and for the Hall of Fame you talk about longevity and career numbers, whatever, but then you have the Sandy Koufaxes who impacted the game in a shorter duration, and I think Buster's done that — he led us to three titles.”

There's still the rest of his career to talk about. Jaffe speculated on how it might look:

“If he went 5-4-3-2-1 in WAR from this year to 2021, his line would look like this: 48.5

career/37.3 peak/42.9 JAWS, which is 10th all-time, 1.0 below the standard, with everybody else in the top 10 but Joe Mauer. And I think it's quite reasonable he will do better than that."

There's that pesky projection angle. What *will* Posey do from here on out?

"At this point I think it's just about piling up enough numbers to have both legacies locked up – winning, and statistical performance," as announcer Dave Flemming put it.

I turned to ZiPs master Dan Szymborski for a five-year projection to see what the numbers say about his future.

Year	G	BA	OBP	SLG	WAR
2018	127	.298	.373	.447	5.1
2019	120	.296	.371	.447	4.6
2020	115	.292	.365	.431	4.0
2021	108	.288	.359	.422	3.4
2022	101	.284	.353	.410	2.9

That's much better than the 5-4-3-2-1 that Jaffe mentioned — to the tune of an extra five wins. And ZiPs ages catchers aggressively.

There's also evidence that he's even better than his totals to date as a catcher. Posey has been an elite framer in his time in the big leagues — last year he was best in the big leagues on Baseball Prospectus' framing leaderboard — and that isn't currently added into FanGraphs' WAR.

The player admitted that framing was important.

"I always give a lot of credit to my college coach Mike Martin Jr., because when I made the transition to catcher, he really harped on framing," Posey said. "We would get on the pitching machine, and the pitching machine was not consistent, it would sink some balls, and cut some balls, and he would be on us a lot about trying to present that pitch well. Ever since I've been catching it's been something that I've been trying to work on and improve on."

You can add that value retroactively, but what if he moves off the position like Mauer?

Szymborski pointed out that Posey would be projected for 5-6 percent better league-adjusted OPS in 2022 if he were projected as a first baseman.

So it's not a position switch that may stand in Posey's way. More games at first may help him age better. In fact, more games at first base may help Posey with the real obstacle when it comes to statistics: his hit total.

“Really the one thing to worry about is that damn 2,000-hit bar,” Jaffe pointed out, “because until somebody with fewer hits breaks through, it has to be considered very real.”

With Szymborksi’s projections (as a catcher), Posey would finish the 2022 season with 1,733 hits.

Posey, with all his hardware — Rookie of the Year, Most Valuable Player, three rings and five All-Star appearances — has the accolades to overcome what might be a random statistical foible. But there’s another roadblock approaching, possibly.

Let’s talk about Mauer again for a second. He has a similar statistical argument for the Hall — six All-Star appearances and an MVP on his own resume. But his team signed him to a big deal, he had to move off catcher, and the team has struggled. He’s become a focal point of blame at times, and does not have the same stone-cold lock feeling when it comes to the Hall.

Could a run of bad Giants teams sully Posey’s case for the Hall?

Posey is at risk of having one of the worst team records among Hall of Fame caliber catchers, and that number could get worse if the Giants put up more losses on the end of his career. Here’s Posey’s team record along with the catchers already in the Hall:

Player	Win	Losses	Team Win%
Mickey Cochrane	915	519	0.638
Roy Campanella	741	427	0.634
Bill Dickey	1059	617	0.632
Yogi Berra	1066	625	0.630
Johnny Bench	1011	723	0.583
Gabby Hartnett	992	756	0.568
Gary Carter	1116	931	0.545
Ray Schalk	894	772	0.537
Carlton Fisk	1180	1022	0.536
Mike Piazza	872	756	0.536
<i>Buster Posey</i>	<i>418</i>	<i>364</i>	<i>0.535</i>
<i>Joe Mauer</i>	<i>484</i>	<i>435</i>	<i>0.527</i>

Ivan Rodriguez	1238	1161	0.516
Ernie Lombardi	735	788	0.483
Rick Ferrell	818	940	0.465

Only two Hall of Fame catchers had team records that were below .500, and of the best three catchers not in the Hall — Thurman Munson (.547), Ted Simmons (.506), and Bill Freehan (.527) — two had records worse than Posey’s right now.

He’s likely to move the wrong way on this leaderboard, unless the team rights ship. Could that change things? Jaffe wasn’t sure.

“Given his hardware (ROY, MVP, three rings, 5 All-Star appearances), I have a hard time imagining anything being so dire for Posey regarding a parting of the ways in SF — this isn’t Twins fans blaming Joe Mauer for sucking up payroll while they root for a team that thinks high strikeout rates are for coastal elites. ”

Those closer to the team didn’t think so, either.

“I don’t think Buster’s candidacy would be affected by some extended team struggles for the Giants,” Flemming said. “I think his legacy as a keystone for championships has been cemented into place.”

Bochy thought these fallow days could even help his legacy, to an extent.

“He is so professional how he plays the game and how he handles our situation, which hasn’t been very good to be honest with you,” Bochy said, “and he does his obligation and responsibility to come out here and perform to the best of his ability and he does that every day.”

The fact remains that Mauer’s candidacy is very similar to Posey’s, and yet there’s less of an aura about the Twin. Three rings may do that for you.

And we have to remember that, by the time he’s eligible for the Hall, our attitudes may have evolved about player value. Given the way teams are using starters and bullpens these days, we know that we will have to change our mind about 300-win starters soon, for example. Just as our feelings about reliever value have shifted — we’ve now admitted a few, at least — our feelings about Posey’s framing, calling and defensive value may move forward.

“He has an impressive resume,” summed up Bochy, who knows a thing about catching.

There might still be a few boxes to check — for the voting public as much as the player himself — but it certainly looks like Posey is well on his way to ending up in Cooperstown.

The Athletic

A loss for the Giants, a loss for baseball: Johnny Cueto will undergo Tommy John surgery **Andrew Baggarly**

SAN DIEGO – Before stopping to analyze how losing Johnny Cueto to Tommy John surgery will impact the Giants in the final two months of the season, or how it will impact their offseason priorities as they seek to replace a top-of-the-rotation presence in 2019, before engaging in told-you-sos about signing a pitcher in his 30s to a six-year, \$130 million contract or general castigations of the front office, before taking this unsurprising yet unsparingly grim news to fuel cries of doom over the medium-term health of this franchise, let's stop for a moment to consider this:

Johnny Cueto won't throw a competitive pitch for a year. And that absolutely sucks.

You won't see him quick-pitch or shoulder-shimmy or stick his oversized cap in the crook of his arm as he walks off the mound. You won't see him laugh at Billy Hamilton while simultaneously trying to pick him off. He won't be on the mound keeping infielders constantly on their toes with his brisk pace or wrapping up a getaway game in two hours, 15 minutes.

He'll still have his Instagram posts. But he is at his whimsical best while disrupting the timing of the best hitters in the world. That source of joy, at least for a year, will be interrupted by the tedium of rehab work, stretching exercises, resistance bands and ... well, let's list off the stuff on random sheet from left-hander Will Smith's thick recovery binder:

Bretzel anterior chains (three sets of 20). Rotational lateral squats (two sets of 10, each side). Scapular wall slides (two sets of 10). Keiser Gray Cook press (two sets of 10, each side)

This will be Cueto's life for the next year after the Giants announced Wednesday what was apparent from his four-inning struggle last Saturday against the Milwaukee Brewers: he will undergo Tommy John surgery to reconstruct a damaged ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow.

The procedure will take place in Los Angeles at the Kerlan-Jobe Clinic, with Dodgers orthopedist Dr. Neal ElAttrache performing it. In the best possible scenario, Cueto might be available to make a start or two in September 2019 – and if you're the sort who bends towards optimism, a playoff run.

The safe and best hope, though, is that Cueto will have a normal winter prior to the 2020 season and be healthy enough to provide some value in the final two years of his contract. He will make \$21 million salaries in each of those final two years; the Giants hold a \$22 million option for 2023 that has a \$5 million buyout.

The Giants are not a poor franchise. They can afford an albatross or two on their payroll. Of course, they have something nearer to a gathering flock of them. They have \$125 million

committed to nine players next year, and nearly the same amount committed to eight players in 2020. They have less future financial flexibility than any franchise in baseball. And that's before adding on a possible mammoth extension to Madison Bumgarner, who will be a free agent after 2019.

It is a difficult quagmire, and yes, the Giants drove themselves straight into it. The fact they will have to replace Cueto, even with the emergence of rookie pitchers Dereck Rodríguez and Andrew Suárez, only makes their tires spin faster. How they get out of it might be a better use of time and thought, and there will be plenty written and said to that end.

For now, Johnny Cueto won't shimmy his shoulders for at least a year, and maybe not until 2020. Obviously, that is not good for the Giants. It's also not good for baseball.