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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants swept out of Coors in Fourth of July dud

Henry Schulman

DENVER — By sheer fate, according to the league, the Giants were scheduled to play at Coors Field on Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day.

The Giants can make a highlight film of their adventure and title it, “Wins Take a Holiday.”

After losing two of three in May, the Giants were swept out of Denver on the Fourth of July with a 1-0 loss, which is hard to do here. Since the gates on Blake Street first opened in 1995, only 10 games have been settled by that score.

Getting shut out by any score at Coors is not easy. This was the seventh time in 24 seasons for the Giants and a fitting death rattle for a series in which they scored three runs in three games.

Again, that’s at Coors Field, where they had not scored fewer than seven runs in any three-game series.

“We’ve got to make some kind of adjustment when we come back here,” Buster Posey said. “The past three games, what did we score, three runs? We’re better than that.”

Are they?

The biggest story line over three months and change has been injuries, particularly in the rotation — but maybe it should be the offense, which is having a devil of a time staying consistent, especially on the road. The Giants paradoxically are averaging more than a run better at pitcher-friendly AT&T Park than away from it.

The Giants have scored enough to stay in contention, a couple of hot bats and clutch hits at a time. Now, nobody is hot.

Joe Panik was not a cause of the sweep, but a symbol of the Giants' struggles over three balmy evenings. The last time Panik played at Coors, he set a club record with 12 hits in three games. This time, he was 0-for-9.

The Giants mustered three singles in the finale, two in eight innings off Tyler Anderson, and had just 14 hits in the three games, three for extra bases, all on Monday.

True, Colorado starters Kyle Freeland, Antonio Senzatela and Tyler Anderson were tough, but an offense can tip its cap only so many times before everyone strains a shoulder.

"They've been pitching well," manager Bruce Bochy said. "Still, you'd like to think in this ballpark you're going to find a way to get some runs. We couldn't."

The Giants went 3-3 on their trip. Though that bettered every other multicity trip this season, it was still a disappointment.

Their three-game sweep of first-place Arizona should have been a launch point for something bigger and better. Instead, it was a setup for another punch line at Coors, and more evidence for the argument than this was, is and will remain a .500 team.

Rookie starting pitcher Andrew Suarez gave them seven brilliant innings in a loss caused by one pitch in the seventh that Chris Iannetta hit out. His hellacious homer cleared a tunnel just fair and landed on a concourse in front of a frozen-yogurt stand.

Suarez's handling of Nolan Arenado demonstrated why the lefty was in no danger of losing his rotation spot with Johnny Cueto's return Thursday night or Jeff Samardzija's on Saturday.

Suarez struck out Arenado with a perfect 3-2 curveball in the first inning, induced a foulout with a slider in the third with runners on the corners, then struck him out on a high fastball in the sixth.

Pshaw, the rookie exclaimed.

"I think hitters are different every day," he said. "Next time I throw those same pitches, he'll probably go 2-for-3. You never know. The way Buster calls a game is amazing. I've just got to execute it."

The Giants play their final 10 games before the All-Star break at AT&T Park, where they went 12-4 over their past two homestands.

Their next 34 games will be circadian-friendly. All are effectively in the Pacific Time Zone.

Seventeen of the next 19 are in the Bay Area, including three at Oakland after the break, with two games in Seattle.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants might have Austin Slater play infield to boost righty presence

Henry Schulman

DENVER — The Giants have an issue that has made them increasingly wary of baseball's left-wingers.

Since Memorial Day, when the Giants last were here, they have won 15 of 19 games when facing right-handed starters. But they have lost 10 of 15 against lefties while scoring two or fewer runs in each of their past seven, including Wednesday night.

The issue has become more noticeable since Evan Longoria got hurt and the Giants lost his .882 OPS against lefties. The problem had arisen before that as Andrew McCutchen failed to hit consistently, Buster Posey's power declined and Austin Jackson failed to hit at all.

Alen Hanson and Pablo Sandoval can switch-hit, but both are far weaker from the right side.

The Giants are contemplating one out-of-the-box solution: playing Austin Slater at second or third base against lefties, freeing an outfield spot for Jackson or Hunter Pence.

Manager Bruce Bochy considered it Wednesday but decided not to toss Slater into the infield at Coors Field, where defense is paramount, although Bochy laughed when he reminded himself that he had Sandoval start a game here in May.

Slater played a lot of second base early in his minor-league career and will get grounders there, and at third and first.

"No question, we've got to try to get creative here," Bochy said.

The Giants added one right-handed hitter to face lefty Tyler Anderson on Wednesday by recalling Kelby Tomlinson to start at third. Reliever Pierce Johnson was optioned.

Tomlinson singled for one of two hits the Giants mustered in eight innings against Anderson.

The Giants catch a break this weekend against the Cardinals, who will start four right-handers.

Young and old: Joey Bart, the Giants' first-round pick and No. 2 overall, already has caught a pitcher who has a major-league no-hitter.

In his fourth professional game Saturday, for one of the Giants' rookie-league teams in Arizona, the 21-year-old caught two innings from Chris Heston, the 30-year-old right-hander who no-hit

the Mets in 2015.

Heston began the year at Triple-A but hurt his shoulder and is working to get back in the rookie league.

Bart on Tuesday was re-assigned to the Giants' short-season Class A team in Keizer, Ore., after dipping his toes into pro ball in Arizona. Bart slammed two homers Wednesday night in his first game for Salem-Keizer.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants lack holiday spark, waste Suárez's gem in Fourth of July loss

Kerry Crowley

DENVER—The Giants were decked out in red, white and blue for Independence Day, but there would be no celebrating in the visiting clubhouse on this Fourth of July.

Rookie left-hander Andrew Suárez turned in a holiday masterpiece on the mound, but the Giants' offense failed to provide any fireworks as the club suffered a 1-0 defeat that capped off a three-game sweep for the Rockies.

"There's some sort of adjustment when we come back that we've got to make," catcher Buster Posey said. "I'm not sure what it is yet but we're better than that. To have three games and score three runs, we're better than that."

After taking three straight from the first-place Diamondbacks to open a six-game road trip, the Giants failed to capitalize on any of their opportunities to secure their first winning road trip of the season and lost a series finale in Colorado after recording just three hits.

Suárez allowed just one run over seven brilliant innings of work, but a 453-foot flyball from Rockies catcher Chris Iannetta that barely curled inside the left field foul pole was all Colorado needed to ruin the Giants' holiday festivities.

"It just cut a little bit instead of going down," Suárez said of the slider Iannetta hit. "He hit it really well and I've got to tip my cap to him."

Iannetta's seventh inning home run landed in front of a frozen yogurt stand beyond the left field bleachers, but no item that shop serves is as cold as the Giants at Coors Field.

After scoring at least seven runs in every three-game series at the park since it opened in 1995, the Giants managed just three runs in a miserable series this week.

"It's really hard to lose three games, but we're there," center fielder Gorkys Hernández said. "We're fighting to finish strong in the first half and I believe in the guys here."

The lone spark for the Giants was Suárez, who excelled under pressure and paraded from the dugout to the mound with confidence for seven innings of one-run ball Wednesday.

The debate over which five pitchers will hold down spots in the Giants rotation will likely continue after Dereck Rodríguez and Jeff Samardzija start this weekend, but Suárez's recent breakthrough has given the club every reason to continue running him out to the mound every fifth day.

After posting a 2.62 ERA in six June starts, the left-hander silenced the Rockies for much of Wednesday's outing and logged his fifth straight start in which he's allowed two runs or fewer.

"I think he's really starting to gain a lot of confidence," Posey said. "Moving the ball around with four pitches now and to go through the lineup here, guys that have had a lot of at-bats in this ballpark as efficiently as he did is about as good as it gets."

Though the Giants haven't announced whether Suárez or second-year right-hander Chris Stratton will start Monday's game against the Cubs at AT&T Park, the rookie should have a massive upper-hand in retaining his spot in the rotation following his latest effort.

Still, one earned run coupled with a lack of offense resulted in the Giants' 15th loss in their last 17 games in Denver. Their recent struggles in Colorado have come in all forms, as they've lost high-scoring affairs, pitchers' duels and their fair share of non-competitive blowouts.

After falling 8-1 Tuesday, Giants manager Bruce Bochy attributed the first two defeats of the series to the club's inability to hit against a Rockies pitching staff that owns the second-worst ERA of all teams in baseball.

Their fortunes didn't change much in Wednesday's series finale, as a Kelby Tomlinson single to right field was the club's only hit through the first five innings against Rockies lefty Tyler Anderson.

Despite owning a 4.23 ERA, Anderson was coming off his finest outing of the year, an eight-inning scoreless performance against the Dodgers in which he allowed just four hits.

"The bottom line is the whole series their pitching just did a job on us," Bochy said. "The guy tonight came off a great outing in LA and threw another beauty for them."

Anderson didn't throw many off-speed pitches against the Giants, instead opting to mix two different fastballs and a reliable cutter that may have been his most effective offering.

Anderson carried over his dominance from his last start against a Giants team that has now scored two runs or fewer against seven straight left-handed starters. San Francisco's struggles against southpaws have become a drastic issue, and one that Bochy attempted to solve by starting switch-hitter Alen Hanson at shortstop, rookie Austin Slater in left field and infielder

Kelby Tomlinson at third base.

The Giants promoted Tomlinson from Triple-A Sacramento prior to Wednesday's game so both Brandon Crawford and Pablo Sandoval could rest against Anderson, and he delivered immediately with a base hit to right field to lead off the third inning.

Though Tomlinson's latest stint in the big leagues will likely last just one game, Bochy indicated the Giants will need other ways to inject life into an order that has fallen flat against lefties since third baseman Evan Longoria was placed on the disabled list.

"You think in this ballpark you're going to find a way to get some runs," Bochy said. "But we couldn't. All three of their guys, their starters were on top of their games and pitched great games against us."

San Jose Mercury News

Giants considering new lineup tweaks to solve struggles against lefties

Kerry Crowley

DENVER—Austin Slater has never played second base in a major league game, but Slater nearly started at the position in the Giants' series-finale at Coors Field.

Manager Bruce Bochy acknowledged his team is struggling against left-handed starters, but he elected to start the right-handed Slater in left field Wednesday.

Bochy considered replacing second baseman Joe Panik, a lefty, with the rookie so he could have both Slater and outfielder Austin Jackson start against Rockies southpaw Tyler Anderson.

"He's played some second and some third, it's just been awhile," Bochy said. "This is kind of a tough park to put a guy in, although I did it with Pablo (Sandoval). So I decided to go with our guy there at second."

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The Giants had Slater take reps at first base during the first half of the season with Triple-A Sacramento, and in addition to taking grounders at second, Slater could be in line for some work at third base in the near future.

The club is expected to be without third baseman Evan Longoria (fractured hand), a key middle of the order presence against left-handed pitchers, for the next three-to-five weeks.

San Francisco's team average is .262 against right-handed pitchers and .242 against lefties, and even with a loss on Tuesday against Rockies pitcher Antonio Senzatela, the Giants have still won 15 of their past 19 games against right-handed starters.

On the other hand, the Giants have failed to score more than two earned runs against six straight left-handed starters and have been limited to two runs or fewer against 17 of the 34 lefty starters they've faced.

Bochy elected to rest shortstop Brandon Crawford and interim third baseman Pablo Sandoval against Anderson Wednesday, inserting the right-handed Kelby Tomlinson into the lineup at third base alongside switch-hitting shortstop Alen Hanson.

Tomlinson was promoted Wednesday from Triple-A to take the roster spot of reliever Pierce Johnson, who was optioned to the minor leagues after throwing 2 1/3 innings Sunday and logging 1 1/3 frames in Tuesday's blowout loss to the Rockies.

Tomlinson's stay with the big league club is expected to be short, as he'll likely head back to Triple-A Thursday when the Giants activate right-hander Johnny Cueto from the disabled list ahead of his start against the St. Louis Cardinals.

The Giants will also need to make a 40-man roster move to clear space for Cueto, who was placed on the 60-day disabled list after suffering an elbow sprain.

In previous years, the Giants often rested first baseman Brandon Belt against left-handed starters, but Bochy said he can't afford to take Belt out of the lineup with the way he's performed of late.

Belt is hitting .264 against left-handers compared to a .317 mark against righties, but his on-base percentage is .367 against southpaws.

Buster Posey is catching for the third consecutive day and Bochy said it's "50-50" whether he'll slot Posey in to catch Cueto for the start of the Giants' homestand Thursday.

MLB.com

Suarez twirls gem, but Giants blanked by Rox Chris Haft

DENVER -- The Giants will return to Coors Field on Labor Day to begin a three-game series. By then, they hope they'll have solved their offense's split personality.

The team that plays in a pitchers' park, yet generates noticeably more offense at home than on the road, ended its two-city, six-game road trip in fitting fashion Wednesday. San Francisco collected three hits and lost to Colorado, 1-0, concluding a three-game series sweep for the Rockies at Coors Field -- where many Major League hitters tend to get healthy.

Not the Giants. After scoring 18 runs and batting .306 in a three-game series sweep at Arizona, they came to Colorado and mustered three runs while hitting .152 (14-for-92). San Francisco's three-run total was its lowest for a series at Coors Field, and its worst output in a three-game

series since they scored two runs at Arizona from June 12-14, 2015.

"There's some sort of adjustment when we come back here that we have to make. I'm not sure what it is yet," Giants catcher Buster Posey said after a brisk game that went 2 hours, 15 minutes. "We're better than that."

Fortunately for the Giants, they begin a 10-game homestand on Monday that will lead them into the All-Star break. They're averaging 4.8 runs per game at AT&T Park, compared to 3.5 per game elsewhere.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy couldn't fathom why his club thrived in Arizona yet slumped at Colorado.

"We played so well in Arizona," Bochy said. "We swung the bats well. Coming in here, you're feeling pretty good about where we were offensively."

The Giants felt bad about squandering another promising performance by rookie left-hander Andrew Suarez, whose only blemish was yielding Chris Iannetta's one-out homer in the seventh inning.

Iannetta connected with Suarez's 3-2 pitch and drove it onto the left-field concourse a Statcast-projected 453 feet, right inside the foul pole. After a replay review, the call stood. And that made a winner of Colorado starter Tyler Anderson (6-3), who allowed two hits in eight innings.

Posey had one of the best views of Iannetta's homer's path.

"It's hard to tell," Posey said. "It's so close, I could see it going either way."

The same could be said of Suarez's immediate future. With a 2.10 ERA over his last five starts, he typically would be entrenching himself in the starting rotation. But with Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija returning from injuries this week, the Giants must ponder how to accommodate their arms.

"I'm not focused on any of that," Suarez said. "I just do my work and whatever happens, happens."

Posey has caught every important Giants pitcher since the club's rise to World Series-winning prominence in 2010 -- Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain, Madison Bumgarner, Ryan Vogelsong, The "Core Four" of relievers. Posey agreed with the suggestion that Suarez might possess enough skill to join that group.

"I think he's really starting to gain a lot of confidence, moving the ball around with four pitches now," Posey said, referring to Suarez's slider, fastball, curveball and changeup. "To go through the lineup here against guys who have had a lot of [at-bats] in this ballpark as efficiently as he

did was about as good as it gets."

SOUND SMART

How good was Suarez? He retired Rockies slugger Nolan Arenado three times, each with a different method. He struck out Arenado with a 78-mph curveball in the first, then got him to pop up on a 93-mph fastball in the third. Arenado struck out again in the sixth, this time on a slider.

UP NEXT

Having avoided Tommy John surgery, Giants right-hander Johnny Cueto will come off the disabled list to make his sixth start of the season in a 7:15 p.m. PT contest against the Cardinals on Thursday to open a 10-game homestand. San Francisco is 4-1 in games started by Cueto, who hasn't pitched since April 28. Luke Weaver will start for the Cardinals.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Down on the Farm: Giants flame-throwing prospect Ray Black invited to Futures Game Dalton Johnson

Every year, baseball's next young stars are showcased at the All-Star Futures Game. The top prospects in the game gather on the same field for a showdown of USA vs. World. Not too often do you see a 28-year-old in this game with teammates searching for their first hair on their upper lip.

That's exactly the case with Giants prospect Ray Black, as Bill Laskey revealed on KNBR during the Fourth of July.

"It was a great feather in the cap to be honest with you," Black said. "It was nice to be invited, to be recognized."

The game will be on Sunday, July 15, as part of MLB All-Star Week in Washington, D.C. If Black will participate in the game is another story.

"I'm not sure if I'm going to go or not," Black said. "It's still something I have to discuss with the organization, my agent, my family. We're out here in Sacramento and the game's out in D.C. as you know, so it's a lot of travel for one day to throw one inning.

"Just trying to weigh the pros and cons right now, but an absolute honor to be invited."

Black's name has been discussed for years within the Giants organization. Ever since he signed with the team as a seventh-round pick in 2011, injuries have derailed Black's right arm that casually throws 100 mph on a nightly basis. Shortly after he signed, Black underwent labrum surgery and was told he only had a one out of three chance at ever throwing a baseball again.

"When things have gone well, they've gone well. But when they've gone bad, they've gone

really bad," Black said on his injury history.

After years waiting to toe the rubber as his name again was etched on the disabled list, Black finally made his debut in 2014 with the Augusta GreenJackets. He only pitched three games last season due to elbow issues, but now that he's healthy this season, Black has been nearly unhittable.

Serving as the closer in Sacramento, Black hasn't allowed an earned run in his last 10 appearances out of the bullpen. Over that stretch, he's won two games, allowed four hits and one walk, all while striking out 16 batters. Between Double-A and Triple-A, Black is 2-0 with a 2.35 ERA and has 56 strikeouts to 11 walks in 30.2 innings pitched.

The big 6-foot-5, 225-pound closer is known for his fastball that has reached 104 mph. In Sacramento, he's also working on a better curveball and slider with pitching coach Steve Kline. Black says at the beginning of the year, the pitches were too close in speed, both at about 82 mph. Now, Black's hard slider sits around 88 mph and has recently touched 92 mph as he then mixes in his slower curveball as well.

It's been a long road for Black. With success in his pocket one step away from the bigs, his goal has always stayed the same.

"My goal has always been to get to the big leagues. And whatever way that is, whatever route that is -- I've taken the path less traveled to try and get there and experienced some setbacks, but for me I've always been kind of a short inning guy. Whether that puts me in the back of the bullpen or not... I think that's probably where my role will be."

Between the Flying Squirrels and River Cats, Black has converted five of his six save opportunities. When the game matters most, the River Cats call his name and that's exactly how he wants it.

"I love having the ball in pressure situations," Black said. "I enjoy it. The new 10th inning role in the minor leagues -- a runner starts on second base -- I love that. When you're going for strikeouts, that's when I like to pitch."

As the Giants (45-43) sit 3.5 games out of first place in the NL West, even Bruce Boch has admitted to keeping an eye on Black. And Black has done the same with the Giants as his dream gets closer to a reality. For now though, he's solely focused on his role with the River Cats.

"For me, I'm locked in and just trying to do the best job I can for the Giants here in Sac," Black said shortly before closing out another day's work.

The Athletic

Giants offense frustrated at Coors Field, and their road hitting woes defy explanation

Andrew Baggarly

DENVER – They put on one of baseball’s flashier fireworks shows here at Coors Field, and as it happens, the Giants are on the Colorado Rockies’ home schedule this season for all three of America’s summer holidays.

A sellout crowd groaned when it was announced that Wednesday night’s July 4 postgame fireworks show would be delayed. Lee Greenwood would have to wait. There was a stray thunderstorm skirting the area. There was also this: it was still light outside.

That was the consequence of a game that took just two hours and 15 minutes to complete. That is how efficiently Giants rookie Andrew Suárez pitched, yielding just a solo home run to Chris Iannetta in seven innings, while leaving no doubt about his place not only in the rotation but in its upper echelon.

That was how quickly and easily the Rockies got on and off the field against a Giants offense that continued its cycle of raising meager expectations only to disappoint once again.

They played the 10th 1-0 game in Coors Field history, and for the first time, the Giants came out on the wrong end of it. While getting swept in three games here, the Giants scored a total of three runs. That is almost impossible to comprehend. In all their previous three-game series here, the fewest runs they had scored was seven.

They arrived here coming off a sweep of the first-place Diamondbacks in Arizona only to head home with a .500 trip and back to bobbing two games over the .500 mark.

That is the defining feature of a .500 team, isn’t it? Inconsistency? Gaining ground only to cede it right back?

In the wider scope, though, the series at Coors Field underscored a very consistent and very, very maddening pattern: almost to a man, the Giants are not hitting as well on the road.

This is as counterintuitive as fireworks in a domed stadium. Giants players usually fatten up their averages and slugging percentages when they leave the breezy, pitcher-friendly environs of home. This year, the opposite has been true.

Here is a sampling of home batting averages, OPS and home runs at AT&T Park:
Buster Posey (.336/.964/4), Brandon Belt (.322/1.022/8), Brandon Crawford (.326/.916/5), Andrew McCutchen (.266/.804/3), Joe Panik (.261/.691/1), Gorkys Hernandez (.274/.806/6), Pablo Sandoval (.267/.761/4), Nick Hundley (.286/.879/4).

And now let’s examine the road numbers entering Sunday:
Posey (.253/.659/1), Belt (.277/.807/5), Crawford (.299/.838/5), McCutchen (.251/.740/6), Panik (.230/.651/3), Hernandez (.287/.799/5), Sandoval (.244/.664/2), Hundley (.246/.780/4).

Sure, a few players have hit more homers on the road (three out of four for Panik, six of nine for McCutchen). And for a some of them, the split isn't too significant. But for others, and for Posey in particular, the dropoff on the road has been immense.

Go down the line: amazingly, every single Giants player listed above has a higher OPS in home games.

It's no surprise, then, that the Giants are averaging 4.8 runs at home and 3.5 runs on the road. That's a strange and significant difference for a team that has a 36-11 record when they manage to score at least four runs.

Ask them about it and you'll get some variation of "If we knew the answer, we'd fix it."

"I don't know," Posey said. "Everybody can have their theories, but I don't think there's anything you can objectively put your finger on."

Posey did have one theory, but it's pure speculation and he decided to keep it to himself for now. But he touched on another objective fact: this cannot continue, especially when the Giants return here on Labor Day.

The Giants have lost 15 of their last 17 games at Coors Field.

"There's some sort of adjustment we've got to make when we come back," Posey said. "I'm not sure what it is yet. But, I mean, we're better than that, to have three games and score three runs. We're better than that."

In fairness, the Rockies did not roll out retreads and merely hope to eat innings, as they have done through so much of their franchise history. Antonio Senzatela was throwing 95 mph sinkers against the Giants' Triple-A club before he dominated their major league lineup on Tuesday. Left-hander Kyle Freeland is 3-0 with a 2.08 ERA in four starts against the Giants this season, and he outdueled Madison Bumgarner to win Monday night. The Rockies sent another lefty, Tyler Anderson, to the mound on Wednesday and he did what NL West left-handers have done to the Giants all season.

"Bottom line, the whole series, their pitching just did a job on us," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "Still, you'll think in this ballpark you'll find a way to get some runs. We couldn't."

Bochy saw this coming, and he said so publicly, after Evan Longoria fractured his fifth metacarpal when hit by a pitch in Miami last month. He was concerned that he was missing a right-handed power presence in the middle of the order.

It turns out the Giants are missing Longoria in one other respect: he is their only everyday player putting up better numbers on the road. He has hit seven of his 10 home runs away from AT&T Park, where he acknowledged feeling some early-season pressure while trying to impress

a new fan base. He has a .257 average and .770 OPS on the road as compared to .231 and .631 at home.

Longoria should begin taking light swings by the weekend, with the hope of returning shortly after the Giants reconvene out of the All-Star break on July 20.

In the meantime, "We're trying to get creative here," Bochy said.

There is talk now of giving Austin Slater work at second base and third base so he could take starts away from Joe Panik or Pablo Sandoval against lefties

One common method that Bochy used in the past to wedge another right-handed bat in his lineup was to sit Belt, put Posey at first base and start Hundley behind the plate. But Belt has graduated from being subjected to the occasional platoon benching. He is simply too good of an offensive player now, and his at-bats against lefties have been plenty productive. He had four of the team's 14 hits here against the Rockies.

It's clear that Panik hasn't yet graduated to Belt's status, and the second baseman had to come away frustrated while going 0 for 10 in the series. It was quite a different result than his previous visit to Coors Field, when he set a franchise record by collecting 12 hits over 15 at-bats over three games.

Even with left field being a black hole for most of the season, the Giants are getting less production from second base (.646 OPS) than any non-pitcher position on the diamond.

The positive angle is that the Giants have some time to figure this out. They are beginning a 10-game homestand that will take them into the All-Star break and then open up the unofficial second half with an interleague series at Oakland. All told, they will play 17 of their next 19 games in the Bay Area.

They will face four right-handers in the upcoming series against the Cardinals, too.

And they will have Johnny Cueto back on the mound Thursday night, which is unquestionably good news, and Jeff Samardzija back on Saturday, which has the potential to be profitable in several respects.

Even before Suárez threw two beautiful games on this road trip, there was no chance he would cede his rotation spot to either of the two returning veteran pitchers. The left-handed rookie keeps getting better with each outing and Posey likened his stuff and composure to some of the best pitchers he's caught with the franchise.

"He's really starting to gain a lot of confidence and he's moving the ball around with four pitches now," Posey said. "To go through the lineup here as efficiently as he did, it's about as good as it gets."

Nolan Arenado provided a tidy summary. He hit a three-run homer Tuesday off of Chris Stratton, who got ahead in the count but has struggled to put away hitters while lacking command and perhaps conviction in his high-spin curveball. On Wednesday, Suárez threw a gorgeous curveball in a 3-2 count. Arenado swung so hard he almost fell down.

“He’s really figured it out and done more than you ever expect from a young kid,” Bochy said. “We know he’s a major league pitcher and that’s what he’s showing you. He’s got four pitches and velocity. A lot of times you get to two strikes, but you’ve got to finish it off. He’s got the equipment to do that.”

Iannetta’s home run in the seventh inning survived a crew chief review as it curled inside the left field pole – or rocketed inside the pole, to be more precise, since it traveled 453 feet and hit the fro-yo stand beyond the left field bleachers.

But Suárez and Tony Watson pitched so well that the Giants had a chance to win the game with one swing. McCutchen hit a two-out single in the ninth off of Rockies closer Wade Davis and Posey drew a walk to bring Crawford to the plate as a pinch hitter. He launched an inside cutter down the right-field line but well foul. Davis threw another cutter further inside that Crawford swung through. Then Davis tripled up on the pitch and Crawford’s hard contact went directly to right fielder Nick Cuevas.

“We had the right guy up there,” Bochy said. “He got a good swing in.”

Any offense will go through its streaks and slumps, but it’s a strong rotation that best allows a team to peel off series victories, gain ground and continue to plow forward. The Giants played with an injury-decimated rotation in this first half, but they are about to be whole again – and as a bonus, they discovered Suárez through the process.

But without Longoria, they must find a more productive way to limp along and put more runs on the board.

This offense is talented enough to see the light of day – and not when making the final out in a night game.