



## SF Giants Press Clips Monday, April 9, 2018

**San Francisco Chronicle**

**Giants sidestep Clayton Kershaw but fall to Dodgers in 10 innings**

**John Shea**

Before the Giants' 2-1 loss on Sunday, they honored several players from their celebrated history with the Dodgers, and nary a boo was heard when they introduced Steve Garvey.

What has this rivalry come to?

"Different times," kidded former Giants outfielder Jeffrey Leonard, who was part of the ceremony.

Garvey recalled far more hostile receptions from the Candlestick Park folks: "Absolutely," the old Dodgers first baseman said. "They were so cold, to get up and boo was a way to get warm. I wish I could've played here."

Rest assured, the rivalry is in good hands. The teams concluded a memorable, rain-shortened series at AT&T Park, and the finale featured a dominant Clayton Kershaw, a cameo by Buster Posey, another intense extra-inning game and, yes, some booing.

That was reserved mostly for Yasiel Puig.

Kershaw baffled the Giants into the eighth inning before his manager Dave Roberts, after 92 pitches, replaced him. Posey was coming up as a pinch-hitter with two on and no outs.

It was the type of duel that Kershaw cherishes, and he has held Posey to a .238 average in 105 career at-bats. Roberts brought in a right-hander, J.T. Chargois, and Posey lined a single to right to tie the score 1-1.

The game went to the 10th inning before it was decided on Kyle Farmer's double off Pierce Johnson. Hunter Pence singled in the bottom of the inning, but Kenley Jansen struck out Brandon Crawford and Brandon Belt — who argued the final pitch was high — to end it.

The Giants split the series, which lasted two games because Friday's was rained out.

Manager Bruce Bochy didn't start Posey, who caught all 14 innings and 248 pitches Saturday, and also omitted two of his top left-handed batters, Belt (4-for-54 against Kershaw) and Crawford (5-for-38 against Kershaw).

The Giants managed six hits off Kershaw, and the most promising sign belonged to Evan Longoria, who entered 0-for-7 with four strikeouts against the three-time Cy Young Award winner but doubled twice against him.

A day after Andrew McCutchen stamped his name into the lore of the rivalry with a walk-off home run in the 14th, capping a six-hit performance, he went 0-for-4 with a strikeout, though he was robbed in the seventh inning by left fielder Joc Pederson.

The Giants had a good opportunity in the sixth after singles by Gorkys Hernandez and Austin Jackson, but Hernandez was doubled off on Joe Panik's fly to Puig in right.

"Gorkys has to hold his ground a little bit more," Bochy said. "Puig's a pretty good outfielder. We've seen him make some great plays."

Another blown chance came in the eighth when Jackson, after the Posey single put runners at first and second, missed on two attempts to put down a sacrifice bunt, then bounced into a double play.

"There were a couple of spots in that game that were the turning point," Bochy said. "We didn't execute the bunt there, and that didn't help matters because we really did a good job battling back to tie the game."

Giants starter Ty Blach, who has a nice history against the Dodgers — especially when opposed by Kershaw — worked six innings before Hernandez hit for him. The only damage off Blach was Matt Kemp's fourth-inning single that scored Puig.

Blach got the Opening Day nod because of Madison Bumgarner's broken pinkie and went against Kershaw, throwing five scoreless innings. Blach's ERA in six starts against the Dodgers, four on Kershaw's watch, is 1.42.

"Anytime you get an opportunity to compete against some of the best in the world, that's what you dream of," Blach said.

## **San Francisco Chronicle**

### **Giants' Bruce Bochy, Brandon Belt dispute final pitch: 'It wasn't a strike'**

**John Shea**

The Giants blew opportunities before Brandon Belt struck out looking to end Sunday's 10-inning loss to the Dodgers, but it still wasn't easy to take.

Especially because the Giants thought umpire Bruce Dreckman got the call wrong.

"Tough call in the end. It's a ball," manager Bruce Bochy said. "That's the way the game goes sometimes: The call goes against you, the ball doesn't bounce your way. Certainly, it wasn't a strike."

Belt vehemently objected to Dreckman.

"I said it wasn't close. He said it was close," Belt said. "Even if it was close, close is not a strike."

Belt pinch hit with Hunter Pence at second and two outs in a one-run game. Belt fouled off the first two offerings and worked the count to 2-2 before Kenley Jansen ended the game on a 91-mph cutter.

Belt was asked about fans who might have wondered if he should have swung at anything close with two strikes.

"It wasn't close, though," Belt said. "I understand. They can say that all they want to, but a ball's a ball. If I'm going to swing at a ball, everyone's going to be a lot more mad if I swing at a ball and miss it."

McCutchen numbers: Andrew McCutchen will go down in elite company for Saturday's 14th-inning walk-off homer.

He became the eighth Giant with a walk-off homer in the 14th inning or beyond. Nobody did it later in a game than Buster Posey, who beat the Reds in May with a 17th-inning homer.

The only time in the Giants-Dodgers rivalry that someone hit a walk-off homer later than McCutchen? Valmy Thomas of the 1957 Giants, 15th inning.

McCutchen is the second player with six hits in a game, including a walk-off homer, following Detroit's Jim Northrup against the A's in 1969.

Three other Giants in the San Francisco era have had six-hit games: Jesus Alou (1964), Mike Benjamin (1995) and Brandon Crawford (2016).

McCutchen is the first player with a walk-off homer in the 14th inning or later since ... himself,

on July 11, 2015.

First win: Nearly lost in Saturday's hubbub was the fact that Roberto Gomez earned his first career win. He threw 25 pitches and gave up a run on three hits in the top of the 14th.

"A lot of emotions," Gomez said. "It was my first win, and it was against the Dodgers."

How much longer could he have pitched? "Whatever was necessary," Gomez said.

Bochy was out of relievers and said the next pitcher he would have used was Derek Holland, Monday's starter.

**San Francisco Chronicle**  
**Andrew McCutchen's big night for Giants was cologne-fueled**  
**Scott Ostler**

You know what Andrew McCutchen's big Saturday night looked like: his six hits, including the walk-off, three-run jack in the 14th inning.

But do you know what it smelled like? It had the aroma of "212 VIP" cologne by Carolina Herrera.

That's the fragrance McCutchen was rocking when he rocked the Dodgers' world, and gave the Giants and their fans a reason to believe.

In the clubhouse before that instant-classic game, Pablo Sandoval offered his new teammate a shot of cologne.

"The cologne's the difference," McCutchen said Sunday morning, with a laugh. "He said, 'I got something for you,' and I said, 'All right.' He was like, 'You're my pick today.' I said, 'OK, cool.'"

"So after the first hit, he kept coming down (to McCutchen in the dugout), looking at me, like, 'Smell my shirt.' ... We kind of like kept joking about it as the game went on. Every hit, he'd come down."

This means that VIP 212 is now classified as a PED — a legal one, fortunately, because McCutchen said Sandoval uses it quite liberally.

On Sunday morning, Saturday's win still smelled sweet. Baseball players do blase better than anyone. It was just one game. It's a long season. Blah-blah-blase. So I was not prepared to hear McCutchen go deep with what that game and that home run meant to him.

That last at-bat was a five-minute drama — 12 pitches, seven foul balls — and McCutchen relived it three hours before Sunday's game, with a small group of reporters at his locker.

After nine seasons as a beloved Pirate, McCutchen is the new guy in town, on a team desperate for help, and he was not off to a very good start. So his obviously emotional reaction to that home run wasn't about the rivalry with the Dodgers, it was about his connection with his new team and its fans.

"Yeah, it didn't have anything really to do with who we were playing. It had to do with just the game in itself, and just everything in general, everything — everything's that's happened in the past offseason, you know, from getting traded, to having a newborn, having a kid, to my family being here, to everything.

"There's a lot that transpired, a lot that has happened in my lifetime that created that one moment. It didn't have anything to do with the Dodgers, honestly."

McCutchen said he had a similar experience when he was called up to the Pirates, taking the place of fan favorite Nate McLouth. Early in the season, McCutchen had a three-homer game and, "That is when I felt like I was kind of cemented there, to where fans could kind of like breathe a little bit. That kind of reminds me of this — being here, new face, new team, wearing a number (22) that's highly liked among fans here (it was Jack Clark's and Will Clark's number). It feels good to be able to have a game like I had yesterday to kind of have somewhat of the same feeling, for sure."

That final Saturday at-bat? No blase there, either.

"That's exciting, man. You dream of those moments, being able to come through," McCutchen said. "When you're a little kid, that's what you're saying when you're playing. You're saying, 'You're down, here comes the pitch!' Everyone says that, so for that actually to come to fruition, that's something special. That's pretty cool."

That final at-bat was practically a three-act play.

"You could definitely feel the shift as the at-bat went on," McCutchen said. "I could feel it. Yeah, it was a good battle. He threw me everything he had."

On TV, Mike Krukow talked about McCutchen's between-pitches step-out, how he seemed to calm himself with deep, yoga-like breathing.

"In that moment, you're so excited, because there's so much happening," McCutchen said. "You're down one, it's the 14th inning, guy on third, no outs. A lot of time you can get a little amped up, because you know you want to get that run in.

"After the first three pitches, I knew I had to kind of calm myself down a little bit, because I was kinda swinging at pitches I shouldn't be swinging at, so I had to just calm down and relax. So I had to keep jumping out (of the box), getting back in, treating it as if it's 10-nothing, we're

winning, I'm just up there trying to have a good at-bat."

It's a mind trick, then?

"You have to, man," he said, "but I think at the end of the day, you have to want that moment, you know? You can't shy away from that. And I live for those moments, because you don't get 'em a whole lot, so when opportunities come, you want to be the guy to come through. Because it's pretty sweet when you do. So when they come, I'm ready. I'm ready to go, and that's my mind-set, and I think that's the first part of trying to have success."

It was fun to see a great athlete quietly savor what was a great moment for himself and his team. McCutchen's wife was at the game, but had to leave early because their infant son Steel was fussy.

"I get to live with that (moment) for the rest of my life," McCutchen said. "I'll be able to tell my son, who's 4 months old, like, 'Dude, when you were 4 months old, man, you were crying all the way back home, so you didn't get to watch it, but I had one of the coolest moments, man.'"

McCutchen added, "Yeah, I'll have that one for a while. It won't be going anywhere. I'll have that one saved in the archives somewhere."

What about Sandoval's cologne? Going to stay with it?

"Why not?" McCutchen said. "Couple sprays, enough to get a little compliment from the umpire when I come to the box."

McCutchen might go down as one of the game's great spray hitters.

## **MLB.com**

### **Small mistakes add up in SF's extra-inning loss**

**Chris Haft**

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Giants found themselves in a familiar place Sunday, locked in an extra-inning struggle against the Dodgers. But this was one of those occasions where operating with little or no margin for error proved too challenging for the Giants, who dropped a 2-1 verdict to their traditional archrivals.

Rookie right-hander Pierce Johnson, who contributed two scoreless relief innings to the Giants' superior all-around effort in Saturday's 14-inning victory, was saddled with the decision this time as he yielded doubles to Cody Bellinger leading off the 10th and to pinch-hitter Kyle Farmer with two outs.

However, the Giants squandered chances to avoid extra innings and inch ahead of the Dodgers much earlier. But little lapses made huge differences:

- Gorkys Hernandez's baserunning blunder in the sixth inning led to a double play that extricated Los Angeles from a two-on, one-out jam.
- Austin Jackson's unsuccessful attempts to bunt in the eighth inning after the Giants forged a 1-1 tie halted their momentum.

In the first instance, Hernandez batted for starter Ty Blach (one run and four hits allowed in six innings) and singled to left-center field. Jackson singled him to second base. Hernandez took off for third base on Joe Panik's subsequent line drive to right, but Yasiel Puig made the catch as well as the short throw to second base for the inning-ending double play.

"Gorkys has to hold his ground a little bit. Puig's a good outfielder," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "It's a tough situation. Gorkys was better off to wait and see what happened."

Two innings later, everything looked full of promise for the Giants as consecutive singles by Hunter Pence, Kelby Tomlinson and Buster Posey, playing the role of pinch-hitter, delivered the tying run. But with runners on first and second and nobody out, Jackson was unable to sacrifice against Dodgers reliever JT Chargois. That changed the complexion of the inning, which turned in the Dodgers' favor when Jackson grounded into a double play. Reliever Tony Cingrani then retired Panik on a fly ball.

The Giants had a chance to at least pull even in the 10th after Hunter Pence grounded a one-out infield single.

"We had some really good hitters coming up," Bochy said. "I liked my chances."

Then, Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen struck out Brandon Crawford as Pence stole second base. Jansen also struck out pinch-hitter Brandon Belt, who was left in disbelief as plate umpire Bruce Dreckman ruled that Jansen's apparently high 2-2 pitch was within the confines of the strike zone.

Asked if he had watched a replay of the final pitch, Belt replied, "Yeah, but I didn't need to. ... A ball is a ball. If I swing at a ball right there, everybody is going to be a lot more mad that I swung at a ball and missed it."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Tommy ball: Less than 24 hours after his 14th-inning single launched the Giants' winning rally Saturday, Tomlinson made another key contribution with his eighth-inning bunt single that caught the Dodgers' defense out of position. It followed a leadoff single by Pence, who advanced to second base and scored the tying run on Posey's pinch-hit single.

Drowning in a sea of glove: Both teams played effective defense, contributing to the low-scoring affair. The Giants supported Blach with a pair of double plays. This helped Blach trim his

career ERA against the Dodgers to 1.90 (10 earned runs, 47 1/3 innings) in nine career games (six starts). Also, reliever Josh Osich helped himself by foiling Chris Taylor's attempted steal of second base in the eighth inning with a timely pickoff throw to first base.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Left-hander Derek Holland will make his second start for the Giants and first at AT&T Park when he confronts the Arizona Diamondbacks in Monday's series opener beginning at 7:15 p.m. PT. Right-hander Zack Godley is scheduled to start for the D-backs.

#### **MLB.com**

**Source: Beede set to make 1st MLB start**  
**Chris Haft**

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Giants are expected to summon right-hander Tyler Beede from Triple-A Sacramento to make his Major League debut and start against the Arizona Diamondbacks, a source close to the pitcher told MLB.com on Sunday.

It was initially unclear whether Beede will start Tuesday or Wednesday. The Giants have not listed a starter for Wednesday, but the source said that Beede could pitch as early as Tuesday. Johnny Cueto is currently listed as Tuesday's starter.

Regardless of which day Beede pitches, his arrival will fill the Giants' need for a fifth starter to appear in a game and give the other starters their usual minimum of four days' rest.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy hinted on Saturday that either Beede or left-hander Andrew Suarez, another prospect at Sacramento, would be chosen to fill the fifth spot in the starting rotation.

Beede, 24, was San Francisco's No. 1 selection in the 2014 Draft (14th overall). Due to inclement weather in Tacoma, where Sacramento opened its season, the Giants sent Beede to join Class A Advanced San Jose to prevent him from getting too much rest. He pitched a five-inning one-hitter last Thursday against Inland Empire at San Bernardino, allowing one run while walking three and striking out four.

MLB Pipeline ranked Beede No. 4 among the organization's top 30 Minor League prospects.

#### **NBC Sports Bay Area**

**Belt upset with game-ending strikeout call: 'It wasn't a strike'**  
**Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO — About an hour after Sunday's loss, Brandon Belt was asked if he had watched a replay of the final strike of the game.

"I did, but I didn't need to," Belt said.



The first baseman, pinch-hitting in the bottom of the 10th, went down looking. With the tying run on second, Kenley Jansen threw a high cutter that Yasmani Grandal — one of the game's best framers — yanked subtly downward. Home plate umpire Bruce Dreckman rung up a livid Belt on a pitch that was clearly a ball.

"That's tough no matter how you look at it," Belt said. "They're humans back there, definitely, but that was so far out that it should have never happened. It was easily too high. There's not much else you can say about it. It wasn't a strike."

Should Belt have protected a bit more on a pitch that close?

"It wasn't close," he countered. "It was not close."

Belt's manager agreed, saying it was "certainly not a strike." In the end, there's nothing the Giants could do about it. Brandon Crawford and Belt went down to Jansen late and the Giants lost 2-1, splitting with the Dodgers for the second time this season. While Bochy was annoyed by the call, he was equally bummed about a series of mistakes the Giants made.

Gorkys Hernandez strayed too far off second on a liner to right in the sixth and Yasiel Puig doubled him off to end an inning and a threat. In the eighth, Austin Jackson failed to get an important bunt down.

"A couple of spots were turning points," Bochy said.

Both went the other way, and so did the game. For the Giants, it was a missed opportunity. They could have beaten Clayton Kershaw for the second time in eight games and sent the Dodgers out of here with a 2-7 record. Instead, both teams are floating somewhere in the middle. The road gets tougher from here. The first-place Diamondbacks visit AT&T Park on Monday night.

## **NBC Sports Bay Area**

### **Andrew McCutchen joins exclusive clubs with walk-off homer**

#### **Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO — Buster Posey is out of the lineup today after catching 14 innings last night. Brandon Crawford is out because Bruce Bochy preferred Kelby Tomlinson to face Clayton Kershaw. Ditto with Pablo Sandoval replacing Brandon Belt.

But Andrew McCutchen is in there, of course, and he'll try to keep the good vibes going after one of the best individual games in Giants history. Here's a rundown of some of what McCutchen did in a 7-5 win Saturday night ...

He became the eighth San Francisco Giant to hit a walk-off homer in the 14th inning or later.

Posey was the last one to do it when he walked the Reds off in the 17th inning last year. (The next day he explained it was dad strength.)

McCutchen is the first player since Detroit's Jim Northrup in 1969 to have six hits and a walk-off homer (per Elias).

He's the first since Guillermo Quiroz in 2013 to have his first homer as a Giant be a walk-off. Quiroz also walked off the Dodgers.

He became the fourth San Francisco Giant to have a six-hit game. Crawford, of course, had seven hits against the Marlins two years ago.

McCutchen became the first big leaguer to hit a walk-off with his team trailing in the 14th inning or later since July 11, 2015 ... when Andrew McCutchen did it to the Cardinals.

Per Mark Simon of Sports Info Solutions, he's the first big leaguer with a walk-off at least 12 pitches into a plate appearance since John Flaherty of the Rays in 2000. And finally, from Daren Willman of Baseball Savant, that was the longest plate appearance of McCutchen's career. So yeah, that was one hell of a moment. And it led to some varied celebrations.

--- I wrote last night about the bullpen, and Bochy today raved about Reyes Moronta. He said Moronta has the equipment to throw in the eighth or ninth, he just needs to tighten up his mechanics a bit. At times, he overthrows.

--- The Giants have hit 10 homers and allowed two. The latter is more impressive, and more important given how often they got hit by the long ball last year. "That's two mistakes to this point," Bochy said. "That's pretty impressive against the guys we've seen."

--- No, Belt was not preparing to pitch last night. Derek Holland had his spikes on and would have followed Roberto Gomez. Instead, Gomez got his first big league win. He had the ball in his locker this morning.

## **The Athletic**

### **Giants analytics: What's sustainable or reversible about the starts for Belt, Panik, Cueto and Longoria?**

#### **Owen Poindexter**

The Giants have started the year with some serious hot streaks and a few players who are atypically cold. Let's look at a few to see what's random chance and what shows signs of a trend.

#### **Brand-new Belt?**

Brandon Belt has opened the year on a hot streak. Thus far, he has rattled off a .304/.385/.522 line, good for a 150 wRC+ (meaning he has been 50 percent better than the average hitter).

This isn't the sort of sample size we should be drawing any definitive conclusions from, but it's noteworthy that Belt has gotten to these results using a different formula than the one we've gotten used to.

Here are some numbers that may tell a story:

	BA on GB	GB%	FB%	K%	BB%	Launch Angle
2016	0.250	26.3	46.0	22.6	15.9	21.0
2017	0.136	29.7	46.9	23.1	14.6	20.9
2018	0.333	20.0	53.3	30.8	11.5	27.4

He's walking less, striking out more, and has managed to dramatically reduce his ground balls, and hit many more fly balls — a finding backed up by a substantially increased launch angle.

His batting average on grounders may provide the motivation: if the shift is turning almost all of his batted balls on the ground into outs, why not try to lift the ball? This approach generally leads to a higher strikeout rate, so that checks out as well. It's too early to tell if the reduced walk rate is a fluke or more aggression from Belt.

Even if the "real" Brandon Belt going forward is something in the middle, that's still a different player than he has been recently. I'll wager that this is a conscious change, and he'll stick with it as long as it's working.

What's wrong with Longoria?

Evan Longoria hasn't looked right so far. Can we glean something beyond the eye test? As with almost everything at this stage, it's too early, but we may have one piece of the puzzle: his pull rate.

Longoria was remarkably consistent in how he distributed the ball, pulling between 41-43 percent of his batted balls every year from 2013-2017, except for a small increase in 2014. This year so far: 62.5 percent. This has made for an ugly mixture with another sudden increase: 56.3 percent of his batted balls are grounders — up from the high-30s of his career and the 43 percent he put up last year.

That stuff can jump around randomly in such a small sample, but peel back another layer and things don't get any better. He's swinging a lot more at pitches in the zone, but he's also missing pitches at an alarming rate. His career swinging strike rate is exactly 10 percent. This year it has jumped to 16.7 percent.

Again, it's early, but this is not simply bad luck. This is bad hitting. Bad stretches happen to good players, but another week or two of this and it's time to start worrying.

Cueto Watch

Johnny Cueto has had great results in his two starts, allowing just one run in 13 innings. In his opening start he allowed one hit and no walks, and it was a big sign that the Cueto of old was back. His second one, despite the positive result, was a step in the wrong direction for the long-term picture. He managed only one strikeout, while allowing eight hits and two walks.

Cueto is giving up a lot of fly balls, and so far none of them have left the park. He's also benefitting from an unsustainable batting average on balls in play (BABIP) of .225.

Nothing that he's doing suggests that he has a new approach to induce weak contact. So, it's fair to assume that he'll get scored on with this profile. The key for him will be to get his strikeout rate back up near the 20 percent he built his career on from the 10 percent where it is now.

To do that, he'll have to boost his swinging strike rate, and this is the real source of my concern. Hitters are swinging a little less often and making more contact. His swing rate on pitches outside the zone has dropped from the low-30s down to 23 percent, while his 84-percent contact rate would be a career high.

It's just two starts, but his ability to fool hitters bears watching.

#### Panik's adjustment

Joe Panik has come roaring out of the gate, swatting three homers so far with a .344 batting average. Looking into his underlying numbers, I was expecting to find something dramatic, such as a huge BABIP. But no, his BABIP sits at .308, barely up from his career norms and a very sustainable number.

His walk rate and strikeout rate are both 8.3 percent, which more or less fits his career pattern. Even his exit velocity is normal. He has managed to trade some groundballs for flies and liners, and his launch angle is up a tick. Still, nothing that suggests a major change in results.

The trick Panik has pulled is quadrupling his HR/FB% while keeping everything else the same. How has he done that? So far, many of his hardest hits have also been at an advantageous launch angle — essentially, when Panik has gotten a pitch to hit, he's been able to hit it both hard and high.

Last year, Panik hit 12 barrels (hits that fall in an optimal range of launch angles at a high exit velocity) over 573 plate appearances, for a 2 percent B/PA. This year, his B/PA is 8.3 percent.

Is this luck or skill? Panik may be the perfect test case for this question: his power is limited, but his great bat control allows him to do what he wants with his swing more than most players. If he can keep a little of the added thump while maintaining his typically high average, he could be in for a big year.

## **The Athletic**

### **Ty Blach continues to mesmerize Dodgers, but small mistakes add up in Giants' 10-inning loss Andrew Baggarly**

The Giants and Dodgers are celebrating their rivalry in this 60th anniversary of both franchises moving to California, and prior to Sunday afternoon's game at AT&T Park, that meant lining up a few former greats like action figures to soak up some pregame applause.

Well, except for Steve Garvey, Ron Cey and Manny Mota. They caught flights to San Francisco, apparently, for the distinct pleasure of getting booed by a sellout crowd.

It's a rivalry, after all.

The Giants have thrown an array of mound artistry at the Dodgers over the years, from Juan Marichal's high-kicking delivery to Gaylord Perry's slippery stuff to Tim Lincecum's electric feel to Jason Schmidt's split-change to Madison Bumgarner's irritation at prolonged eye contact.

And none of them have fared better than Ty Blach.

The unassuming left-hander faced the Dodgers for the fifth time in his career Sunday. He held them to a run on four hits in six innings. He threw a tidy 81 pitches. His career ERA against them actually ticked up, to 1.41. It's still the lowest of any Giants starting pitcher (minimum five starts) over these 60 years.

With Bumgarner's pitching hand in a cast, Blach stepped in and outpitched Kershaw on Opening Day. He brought front-of-the-rotation presence to Sunday's rematch, too.

He did not outduel Kershaw this time, but he pitched the Dodgers' three-time Cy Young Award winner to a near standstill.

The Giants lost 2-1 in 10 innings because it's hard to be perfect over the stretch of a season, or even an afternoon, and the Giants played a subtly imperfect game.

Gorkys Hernandez made a mistake on the bases. Austin Jackson didn't get a bunt down. Right-hander Pierce Johnson missed one location in the 10th inning to Kyle Farmer, who hit a run-scoring double. Brandon Belt got rung up by umpire Bruce Dreckman on a game-ending pitch that he insisted was not only out of the strike zone but not close enough to merit a protection swing.

Belt said he looked at a replay of the high fastball from Kenley Jansen.

"But I didn't have to," said Belt, who stranded Hunter Pence at second base with the tying run. "They're humans back there, definitely, no doubt. But that's just too far out. It should never happen. It was easily, easily too high. There's not too much else to say about it. It just wasn't a

strike.”

A night earlier, Andrew McCutchen fouled off a half-dozen of those high fastballs with two strikes before he got a pitch from Wilmer Font that he could drive for a game-winning, three-run home run. But mention the phrase “too close to take” to Belt and watch his eyes narrow.

“It wasn’t close, though,” he said. “It’s not close. They can say that all they want to, but a ball is a ball.”

Giants manager Bruce Bochy agreed with his player.

“Tough call at the end,” Bochy said. “It’s a ball, but it’s the way the game goes sometimes. It certainly was not a strike.”

You never want to risk letting the umpire to take the game out of your hands. You also have to trust yourself when you see a pitch clearly out of the strike zone. As Belt remarked, fans might be even more upset if he ended the game by chasing a pitch.

It’s easy to pull on Belt’s thread because that’s the one that stuck out in the end. But Brandon Crawford also fouled off a pitch down the middle while Jansen was struggling to locate earlier in the inning. And two other mistakes were clearly more damaging.

Hernandez collected a pinch-hit single in the sixth and advanced to second on Jackson’s single. When Joe Panik sent a sinking line drive to right field that Yasiel Puig caught with a sliding effort, Hernandez got doubled off second base. As Bochy pointed out, with Puig’s arm, there was no chance for Hernandez to score even if Panik’s ball hit the grass.

“Gorkys has to hold his ground a little more,” Bochy said.

The Giants minimized their best chance in the eighth after Pence singled and Kelby Tomlinson followed with a masterful push bunt that got past Kershaw for a hit. Bochy tabbed his loaded bench for Buster Posey, who lined a tying single to right off reliever JT Chargois. But Jackson fouled off a pair of bunt attempts before grounding into a double play, and Panik flied out to end the inning.

The Dodgers went ahead in the 10th when Cody Bellinger hit a leadoff double and scored on Farmer’s double off the arcade. But Johnson did well to strike out Yasmani Grandal and strand two runners in scoring position.

Just a day earlier, the Giants awarded Roberto Gómez his first major league victory after the right-hander gave up a run in extra innings. They could not do the same for Johnson, who took his first career loss, instead.

It was not the first time that Johnson followed Blach on a major league mound. The first time it

happened, they were high school seniors and the setting was a scouting showcase for Denver-area players at Coors Field.

Blach went to Regis Jesuit, a sizable Catholic school in the 3A level. Johnson went to Faith Christian Academy, a small school that dominated 5A competition. They knew all about each other growing up — Johnson is even pretty sure that Blach was on the Parker Bears Little League team that played his Arvada West Wildcats — but they bonded instantly after that day at Coors Field.

They struck up a conversation and knew that they would be crossing paths again soon. Blach was committed to Creighton and Johnson planned to pitch for Missouri State. They would be rivals in the Missouri Valley Conference.

“We pitched against each other our junior year,” Blach said. “He struck out 16 against us in a nine-inning shutout. I guess you could say I didn’t fare as well.”

Johnson is still consoling Blach over that one.

“What did you go, seven and three?” he said to his locker neighbor. “Still a good game.”

They kept crossing paths. They met again when both pitchers were invited to Major League Baseball’s rookie development camp after the 2015 season. That’s when Blach invited Johnson to be a part of his offseason workout group, which includes other big leaguers Ryan Lavarney, Deck McGuire and Greg Bird.

It was an hour-long commute from Arvada in the north suburbs to Centennial, which is south of downtown. But Johnson, who was a first-round pick of the Cubs in 2012, committed himself to it.

When the Cubs got caught in a roster squeeze and designated Johnson for assignment last year, Blach picked up the phone. He asked Johnson what if anything he had heard about another club claiming him off waivers. The next day, Johnson texted with the news that the Giants had picked him up.

The Giants had the next day off. So when Johnson flew in for his physical, he arrived to find one of his best friends ready to give him a personal tour of the ballpark and clubhouse.

“Better get him used to the place where he’d be playing someday,” Blach said, smiling.

Johnson has to laugh at the good fortune: his former roommate from the Cape Cod League is here, too. It’s Chris Stratton.

“The comfort factor of coming to a new team and knowing a few people, I mean, I can’t even put that into words,” Johnson said.

Johnson recalled Blach being the exact same kind of pitcher in college.

“Throws four pitches for strikes, fast tempo and he puts the hitters in a bad position,” Johnson said. “I knew I had to throw my best game on that Friday. Somehow, we prevailed.”

Striking out 16 and going the distance? That probably had something to do with it.

“I think I like having him on my team a little better,” Blach said.

A minor swing here or there Sunday, and Blach and Stratton might have been celebrating Johnson’s first victory. They are confident that will come soon enough.

And so will Blach’s next start in a series against the Dodgers. Kershaw never misses a chance to face the Giants. Bochy has no choice but to counter.