



SF Giants Press Clips Friday, July 6, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle

Orlando Cepeda attends first Giants game since traumatic fall: it's 'like coming home' **John Shea**

Hall of Famer Orlando Cepeda attended Thursday night's Giants game at AT&T Park, his first since a February fall that caused traumatic injuries.

"Coming to the ballpark is like coming home," Cepeda said in a suite above the left-field line during the first inning, while surrounded by family, friends and team officials.

Cepeda, 80, incurred a cardiac episode and head injury from a fall in a parking lot at the Rancho Solano Golf Course complex in Fairfield, which includes a gym to which he belongs.

Thursday, Cepeda's son Ali said his father had suffered a stroke.

"He's battling every day. He's a fighter," Ali Cepeda said. "So he's still got some good years left. He still thinks he could swing with his cane."

Orlando Cepeda is expected to be discharged in the coming weeks from an East Bay rehabilitation facility.

The younger Cepeda said attending the game — and future games — is part of his father's recovery. Orlando Cepeda said he follows the Giants "every night" and it was "amazing" that his first game was between the Giants and Cardinals, two of his former teams.

The outpouring of support from the community has touched Cepeda, who said, "It means a lot. In that situation, you came so close to going the other way, it's amazing to see the people who care about you."

One of Cepeda's first visitors at the hospital was fellow Hall of Famer Juan Marichal, who was in the Bay Area to be inducted into the Multi-Ethnic Sports Hall of Fame in Oakland on Feb. 23. Cepeda was supposed to present him with the award.

"Juan was at his bedside," said Ali Cepeda, adding the former pitcher had Orlando make movements including moving his toes. "Juan kissed him and said, 'I'm your brother, I'm here. Do something for me.' He did. That was big."

Cepeda has remained in good spirits and has been a fighter throughout the ordeal, his son said.

"Beyond. Beyond," Ali Cepeda said. "He went to the doctor today, and the doctor said, 'Could you tell us one thing that hurts?' And he's like, 'I can tell you 50 things that hurt.' The doctor was laughing."

Ali Cepeda said his dad's recovery "means everything. He's the pillar of our family. With my wife and what we've been through, it's been a stop to all our lives with what has happened to him. ... Just to have him here and being able to walk with a cane, it's a huge improvement. That means the world to me and our family and the Giants' family as well."

San Francisco Chronicle

Return home can't wake Giants' offense in 11-2 loss to Cardinals

John Shea

The Giants returned home from their ridiculously low offensive output in the Mile High City on Thursday, only to display more of the same in their own digs.

On the night of Johnny Cueto's long-awaited return to the rotation, the Giants were perfect-gamed for 5 1/3 innings and got drubbed by the Cardinals 11-2.

After winning 10 of 12 to creep to 2½ games out of first place, the Giants have dropped four straight. They got swept at Coors Field because they scored just three runs, the second-fewest in a three-game set in the park's history, and were hoping for a turnaround at AT&T Park, where they had been 26-14.

But the Giants collected just two hits Thursday, and Cueto was no more effective than the Giants' offense, especially early, and coughed up 10 hits in five innings.

The Cardinals pounced on the right-hander for four first-inning runs, three on a homer by Jedd Gyorko, who hit a 3-0 pitch. Matt Carpenter made the lead 5-0 with a homer in the second.

"I was very happy going out there, but obviously sad and a little upset things didn't come out the way I wanted to," Cueto said through interpreter Erwin Higueros.

The Giants, hitting .132 in four games, didn't get their first hit until the sixth inning, on Gorkys

Hernandez's one-out infield single. One out later, Alen Hanson hit a two-run homer, the Giants' first extra-base hit in 23 innings.

That was it. The only two baserunners. The Giants stranded nobody.

"We've got to wake up this offense," manager Bruce Bochy said. "It's got to get going."

For the first five innings, Cardinals starter Luke Weaver — who entered the game with a 4-7 record and 5.16 ERA — set the Giants down 1-2-3. Even though Pablo Sandoval thought otherwise.

Sandoval thought he had walked with two outs in the fifth, thinking he broke up the perfect-game bid as he took first base. However, it was a three-ball count, and Sandoval was sent back to the plate. Two pitches later, he struck out swinging.

On the other hand, it was a 12-pitch at-bat, and Weaver's pitch count went from 45 to 57. The next inning, the Giants reached base. For real this time. But Weaver finished eight innings, the longest start of his career, and struck out seven.

"You get a couple of hits, a couple of runs, that's not going to work," Bochy said. "We saw that in Colorado."

Despite Cueto's pitching line, he and Bochy tried to be positive about the right-hander's first start since April 28, before he was shelved with an elbow ailment. Cueto had a partially torn ligament and, instead of surgery, he rehabbed and made two starts with Triple-A Sacramento.

"Johnny was OK," Bochy said. "He got himself in trouble in the first inning, but after that he got better. That's encouraging. He hit 92 (mph). His stuff picked up, his command picked up."

Cueto said, "I was out almost two months. I'm happy with what I did today. I just have to continue working my way back to where I was."

"Everything was fine except in the first inning when I was trying to be too fine. Instead of pitching, I was just trying to place the ball in the strike zone."

The Cardinals scored four runs off Ty Blach and two off Derek Holland.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Jeff Samardzija 'back to normal,' ready to start Saturday

John Shea

Jeff Samardzija feels far better this time.

"The recovery is quick and normal (with) normal soreness," he said. "That would lead me to

believe we should be all right.”

After making four rehab starts with Triple-A Sacramento, Samardzija will be back in the Giants’ rotation Saturday. It will be his second return from the disabled list this season, after the first proved he wasn’t ready — he posted a 6.56 ERA in eight starts.

Samardzija, who was shelved with shoulder and pectoral injuries, threw 90 pitches Monday and had a quick side session at AT&T Park on Thursday.

“Last time was my first time ever dealing with that,” Samardzija said. “I always willed myself through little injuries and pains here and there along the way. I thought with a little break, I’d be fine. It just ended up being an uphill battle the whole time. We feel back to normal.”

Samardzija had particular trouble in the first inning — 11.25 ERA, .343 batting average against — with issues getting his body loose. He feels better now. Just in case, he plans more pregame throwing and weight room work.

The rotation is getting its key members back. Johnny Cueto came off the DL to start Thursday night’s game, a month after Madison Bumgarner’s return, and Samardzija will be next.

Derek Holland was moved to the bullpen to create a rotation spot for Cueto, and Chris Stratton could lose his rotation spot when Samardzija comes off the DL. The other starters are rookies Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez, neither of whom has pitched his way out of the rotation.

“It gives us coverage and insurance,” manager Bruce Bochy said of all the available starters. “Nobody wants to be that insurance, trust me. At the same time, you have that if something happens. You have guys who have experience up here, success up here.”

Infielder Kelby Tomlinson was optioned to Sacramento to create a spot for Cueto, and pitcher Roberto Gomez was released to open room on the 40-man roster.

MLB.com

Cueto susceptible to HRs in return; bats stymied

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- Thursday was an evening of false starts for the Giants, from Johnny Cueto's first outing in approximately two months to the slumping hitters' futile efforts to get started offensively.

The combination resulted in an 11-2 setback to the Cardinals at AT&T Park that extended the Giants' skid to four games. During that streak, San Francisco has hit .132 while scoring five runs.

Recovered from the elbow inflammation that prompted fears of Tommy John surgery, Cueto allowed five runs and 10 hits in five innings. His typically lively fastball never exceeded 92 mph,

helping the Cardinals surge ahead 5-0 after two frames on Jedd Gyorko's three-run, first-inning homer and Matt Carpenter's second-inning long ball.

"Instead of pitching, I was trying to place the ball in the strike zone," Cueto explained his first-inning woes through an interpreter.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy pointed out that Cueto followed Carpenter's homer with 2 1/3 shutout innings. But Bochy wouldn't guarantee that Cueto, who the Giants are pinning their postseason hopes upon as their No. 2 starter, will regain full effectiveness before the regular season concludes.

"It's hard to say," Bochy said. "We'll have a better idea in the next start or two."

Cueto was more upbeat.

"I'm happy with what I did today," Cueto said. "I just have to keep working hard back to where I was."

For the second day in a row, a relatively anonymous starting pitcher limited San Francisco to two hits in eight innings. This time, it was St. Louis' Luke Weaver, who matched the performance of Colorado's Tyler Anderson on Wednesday.

"A couple of runs and a couple of hits -- that's not going to work," Bochy said, referring to his club's offensive production.

Weaver maintained a perfect game for 5 1/3 innings until Gorkys Hernandez reached on an infield single. A reporter mentioned to Bochy that Weaver entered the game with a 5.16 ERA, suggesting that the Giants should have hit more fruitfully.

This led Bochy to praise Weaver: "He had a good fastball and changeup, and he mixed them with the breaking ball."

Despite averaging a healthy 4.8 runs per game at home entering Thursday, the Giants watched their streak of consecutive innings without an extra-base hit reach 23 before Alen Hanson delivered a two-run homer in the sixth. Of Hanson's 36 hits, 20 have gone for extra bases.

SOUND SMART

Derek Holland's 3 1/3-inning relief stint was his first appearance out of the bullpen this year. Holland recorded three relief outings last season with the White Sox and has 25 in his career. Cueto's activation from the disabled list forced Holland from the rotation to the bullpen.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Pablo Sandoval smartly flipped away his bat and headed for first base after taking a pitch that missed the strike zone with two outs in the fifth inning. The only problem? It was ball three, not

four. Sandoval didn't immediately make himself available for interviews after the game, but he obviously didn't feel self-conscious following his harmless faux pas. After returning to the batter's box, he unleashed a mighty swing at Weaver's next pitch but fouled it off. On the 12th pitch of the at-bat, he struck out.

UP NEXT

The Giants will turn to rookie Dereck Rodriguez (3-1, 3.16 ERA) at 7:15 p.m. PT on Friday. That's not a bad thing: They've won the right-hander's last four outings. Rodriguez will look to start July the same way he pitched all of June, a month in which he posted a 3.21 ERA, struck out 29 and walked just eight batters over 33 2/3 innings. St. Louis counters with John Gant.

MLB.com

Sandoval walks all the way to first ... on ball 3 Joe Trezza

SAN FRANCISCO -- Over the course of the five perfect innings that began Luke Weaver's night in Thursday's 11-2 Cardinals win at AT&T Park, no hitter put up more of a fight than Pablo Sandoval. The Giants' third baseman fouled off six consecutive pitches before seemingly working a walk, accounting for Weaver's first baserunner of the evening with two outs in the fifth.

But shortly after Sandoval reached first, he was called back.

Sandoval had already removed his protective elbow and shin gear and jogged entirely down the baseline before the Cardinals' dugout noticed a vital detail. The 10th pitch of the at-bat -- a curveball from Weaver that hung up and away -- was only the third ball of the sequence, not the fourth.

"I asked the bench," Cardinals manager Mike Matheny said. "I whistled and had the umpire stop for a second. The replay phone rang and by that point, they figured it out on the field."

Given another chance to retire Sandoval, Weaver struck him out on another curve -- the 12th pitch of the at-bat -- to remain flawless through five.

But it did not come without delay. Sandoval took considerable time returning to the plate, so much so that home-plate umpire Fieldin Culbreth allotted Weaver a warmup pitch. Weaver followed that with a 94.2-four-seam fastball that Sandoval spoiled, before getting him on a curve below the zone.

"He wears a lot of gear," Weaver said. "It left me in a weird state of mind there ... it became about trying to lock back in and make a big pitch. I was pretty emotional afterwards because it was a pretty big pitch. I tried not to worry about what was going on with the [perfect game]. I was focusing on executing a pitch that I had just walked him on, so to speak."

MLB.com

Samardzija feeling good before Saturday return

Martin Oppegaard

SAN FRANCISCO -- Jeff Samardzija feels normal again. Everything from the self-described "normal soreness" in his right arm to the familiar foe in San Francisco this weekend has the right-hander confident for his start on Saturday.

"I'm having a good feel for all the pitches, stretch and windup," Samardzija said. "We're going to go out and have a normal day on Saturday."

It will be Samardzija's first game back since sustaining tightness in his right shoulder in an outing May 29. He also spent the first three weeks of the season on the disabled list with a strained right pectoral muscle.

"Last time was my first time ever having to deal with anything like that," Samardzija said of his first DL stint this season. "I've usually willed my way through most little injuries and pains. I thought that one with a little break would be fine, but it ended up being an uphill battle the whole time."

Samardzija made eight starts across April and May before returning to the DL for the entire month of June.

"The way it's been going the last four or five times out, I can tell you it's a lot different than it was the first time after the rehab starts," Samardzija said. "That's what's encouraging, is that the recovery is quick and normal."

After throwing 90 pitches in his fourth rehab outing for Triple-A Sacramento on Monday -- he allowed two runs in six frames -- Samardzija's outing on Saturday against the Cardinals (13th career start) will come on five days' rest and with little limitation.

"Johnny [Cueto] we have to watch a little closer than Jeff," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said.

Samardzija echoed Bochy's sentiments.

"I don't think there's any limit," Samardzija said. "Both times I threw 90, I was ready to keep going and they stopped it there. I felt good."

Smith set to play crucial role moving forward

With a 1.11 ERA and an 0.70 WHIP, Will Smith has been a metronome of consistency for a team with inscrutable home and road splits. He also converted the Giants' last two save opportunities, a role he figures to see more of this season.

"I don't think he could pitch the ninth," Bochy said when asked about using Smith in the closer

role. "I'd say he can and will pitch the ninth. He's one of the guys we use there in that spot. I have no problem pitching Will there."

Starting rotation beginning to shape

Johnny Cueto's return to the rotation on Thursday spelled Derek Holland's shift to the bullpen. With Samardzija set to return Saturday, another move is imminent.

"We haven't made a call yet, but somebody else will probably help us out in the bullpen," Bochy said. "[Ty] Blach went Opening Day for us and now he's helping us out in the 'pen. It's all about everybody wanting the same thing and helping out in different ways."

Bochy will likely make a decision between Chris Stratton or rookies Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez.

"They're doing what you want them to do," Bochy said. "That makes these decisions tough."

The Giants released right-hander Roberto Gomez to make room for Cueto, and they optioned infielder Kelby Tomlinson to Triple-A.

MLB.com

Recovering Cepeda attends Giants game vs. Cards

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- The gentleman looked a trifle thinner, but his genial nature, warm smile and the Giants cap he wore left no doubt that this was Orlando Cepeda, who remains widely adored.

Thursday, the Hall of Fame first baseman visited AT&T Park for the first time this season, giving him the opportunity to see the teams he's identified with the most. Cepeda played for six clubs, but he's particularly known for excelling with the Giants, the club that brought him to the Majors in 1958, and the Cardinals, who relied heavily upon him to win the World Series in 1967, when he was named the National League's Most Valuable Player.

On Feb. 19, Cepeda sustained a head injury resulting from a fall near his home in Fairfield, Calif. It was then reported that Cepeda, 80, had experienced a cardiac-related incident. On Thursday, Cepeda's son, Ali, confirmed that his father suffered a stroke.

But Cepeda survived, buoyed by a legion of supportive relatives and friends. "He's a fighter," Ali Cepeda said.

Among those who helped Cepeda win the battle was Juan Marichal, Cepeda's Giants teammate and longtime friend. Marichal happened to be visiting the Bay Area when Cepeda was stricken, since they were scheduled to receive a sports-related award together. In the early days of Cepeda's illness, Marichal remained by his bedside and repeated doctors' commands, such as

"Wiggle your toes."

Able again to watch the game he loves in person, Cepeda's thoughts turned to those who prayed for him to be in this position.

"In that situation, you come close to going the other way," Cepeda said. "It's amazing to see the people who love you."

NBC Sports Bay Area

Down on the Farm: Giants prospects Ramos, Anderson selected to Futures Game

Dalton Johnson

The Giants will be represented by prospects Heliot Ramos and Shaun Anderson this year at the All-Star Futures Game in Washington, D.C. Ray Black was invited but decided to decline.

Ramos is ranked as the Giants' top prospect by Baseball America and MLB Pipeline. San Francisco selected Ramos No. 19 overall in the 2017 MLB Draft.

This season hasn't been as kind to Ramos as his debut last year. Playing center field for the Augusta GreenJackets, Ramos is batting just .234 with six home runs, 18 doubles and five stolen bases. Ramos is still only 18 years old playing Class A and is seen as a future five-tool player by many.

While the Giants took Ramos with their first-round pick in 2017, Anderson was acquired via trade from the Red Sox on July 26 last year as the team shipped off Eduardo Nunez. So far, the Giants look like winners of this trade.

Anderson, 23, is ranked as the Giants' No. 7 prospect by MLB Pipeline. The 6-foot-4, 225-pound right-hander is 5-5 with a 3.56 ERA in 16 starts this season for the Richmond Flying Squirrels in Double-A. He has also struck out 91 batters in 91 innings pitched.

Even with plenty of competition, Anderson's name can be one to watch for the Giants' rotation as soon as next year.

The game will be played July 15 at Nationals Park.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Johnny Cueto keeping his head up after rocky return from DL: 'It's not easy'

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO — Johnny Cueto was ready to bring some swagger back to a club coming off an embarrassing series at Coors Field. He wore a white jumpsuit to the park and topped that outfit with a white hat that had his face on the front and the initials JC on the left side. Cueto did, in fact, wear a Cueto hat to his post-game media session, but that was the only highlight on an

otherwise lifeless night for a team that once again is stumbling.

Cueto gave up five runs in his first start since April 28, the lineup managed just two hits and two runs after scoring three in a series in Denver, and the bullpen kept piling on after Cueto departed. The Giants lost their fourth straight, 11-2 this time, looking flat in the first of four games against the Cardinals. The lineup looked like it could use a shakeup. Cueto looked like he could use another rehab start.

"It's not easy," he said through interpreter Erwin Higueros. "You have to keep working and working until you get back to where I was. It's not easy, but I just have to keep my head up and keep working."

Cueto smiled several times while answering questions about his five innings, and perhaps that's because at one point he didn't think he would make this start. A month ago, Cueto thought he was headed for Tommy John surgery. After getting the all-clear from Dr. James Andrews, he pushed the rehab pace. Cueto threw 48 pitches for Triple-A Sacramento on June 23 and 69 more last Friday, and when he had a solid bullpen session on Monday, the Giants decided that was enough. It now appears that it wasn't.

The Cardinals jumped on Cueto from the start, scoring four runs in the first and one more in the second. Jedd Gyorko took a poorly-placed 89-mph sinker the opposite way for a three-run homer and Matt Carpenter crushed an 85-mph cutter-that-didn't-cut into the right field seats.

Cueto repeatedly tried to establish his changeup and slider at the bottom of the zone in the first inning, and he finally found some success with that plan in his final three innings, although none of them were clean. He never was able to establish the fastball, though. Just 27 of Cueto's 76 pitches registered as fastballs, and only one — at 91.7 mph — was thrown harder than 91. Four others ticked in at 90 mph, and the rest were below that, well below Cueto's norm. He topped out at 94 mph in April, although his average velocity was generally down then, too.

Asked if Cueto's velocity will tick up as he gets more time on a big league mound, manager Bruce Bochy, generally an optimist, admitted he did not know.

"It's hard to say, it is," Bochy said. "We'll have a better idea with his next start or two, but you look at his early work and that's about where his comfort zone is, 90 (mph), and that works with his command."

Cueto was charged with five earned on 10 hits and two walks. He struck out two and got just eight swinging strikes. He said he felt healthy, though, and perhaps that was the biggest takeaway from the night.

Of course, even if Cueto had been at his best, the Giants still would have struggled to snap their latest skid. The lineup didn't manage a hit until the sixth. Luke Weaver dominated a group that has scored five runs in the last four games.

"You get a couple of hits and a couple runs, that's not going to work. We saw that in Colorado," Bochy said. "Hopefully we come out of this thing soon and take some pressure off these pitchers."

The Athletic

Johnny Cueto returns anew, but still trying to get his old groove back

Shayna Rubin

"Fatherhood Bling" feat. Johnny Cueto: A new song based on an old Drake hit, created by Sacramento River Cats infielder Chase d'Arnaud.

Oh yes, this is real.

The River Cats' infielder dropped a scintillating sneak peak of the Hotline Bling music video parody on his Instagram, and Cueto is featured front and center, dancing by a nice white car with some teammates in the Raley Field parking lot.

Cueto was in his element: content, enjoying his teammates and the near-end to a journey that almost had him out for the long haul.

Not two months earlier the hurler was getting an MRI, and those around him feared the worst. Underneath his 0.84 ERA, built over five Johnny-Beisbol-esque performances to begin the 2018 season, Cueto's right elbow ached.

The injury screamed Tommy John, but a second opinion from Dr. James Andrews twisted Cueto's season right side up again. The young rotation kept heads above water while Cueto took the 60 days to heal. And in two starts with Sacramento at the end of June, Cueto flashed the kind of brilliance he left us with: 7 2/3 scoreless innings, five hits, 10 strikeouts.

Cueto was new again, manager Bruce Bochy assured hours before his starter took the mound Thursday night against the St. Louis Cardinals.

Once Jedd Gyorko slapped a 3-0 sinker in the sweet spot the other way for a three-run homer — off Cueto's 20th pitch of the game — it was clear rust lingered.

Cueto gave up five earned runs on 10 hits and two walks in five innings against the Cardinals. Ty Blach gave up four more runs, Derek Holland two more, and the Giants lost their fourth straight, 11-2.

"I was happy going out there," Cueto said through interpreter Erwin Higueros, "but I was a little sad and upset it didn't come out the way I wanted it to."

Cueto's velocity was a few ticks lower than it registered at the beginning of this season. In his

last start on April 28, Cueto's fastball averaged around 91 mph. Thursday night it hovered in the high 80s for the most part, peaking at 92 mph once.

"We'll have a better idea with his next start or two," Bochy said of the velocity drop. "But you look at his early work and that's where his comfort zone is, 90, and that works with his command."

His changeup had its typically spicy movement and his slider was down, but he lacked fastball command.

"It's not easy," Cueto said. "You have to keep working and working to get back to where I was. It's not easy, but I just have to keep my head up and keep working."

There was only so much Cueto could've done, though. As he departed, the pressure shifted off the starter and onto the offense, suddenly tasked with evading the perfect game Luke Weaver was sewing. It even got to a point where Pablo Sandoval completely lost track of the count and convinced the entire stadium, briefly, that he'd drawn a walk.

He struck out two pitches later, after Cardinals manager Mike Matheny and the umpires sorted things out.

Gorkys Hernández's infield single in the sixth quelled that hysteria. Alen Hanson's two-run homer the following at bat eliminated the possibility that the Giants would get shut out in a second straight game. Still, that was the only offense the team mustered Thursday night.

Their futility on the road and against left-handed starters half-explained the sweep in Denver, at least. But against a right-hander (with a 5.16 ERA) at home (where they are 26-15 with a fifth-best .268 average), the Giants didn't fare any better.

"When you're in a little funk, it makes him tougher to read," Bochy said of his team's offensive struggles against Weaver. "Right now we have guys looking for their swings."

In other words: Don't let Cueto's unceremonious return to the bigs distract you from the fact that the Giants have scored all of five runs in their last four losses.

Anyway, it's normal to be alarmed by Cueto's performance; the numbers themselves are shocking at first glance. Cueto's ERA bumped up to a 1.95 and he wore his first loss of the season when his team yearned for the winning Cueto of old. An optimist could say that Hanson's two-run homer might've won the game in an April Cueto start.

But it's important, in this case, to remember Madison Bumgarner's return not long ago. He, too, was experiencing lower velocity than normal and struggled with command in his first start back in Miami. The frustration that boiled over resulted in Bumgarner's first career ejection. Since then, he found himself amid a 22-inning scoreless streak and compiled a .86 ERA over his last

three starts.

Cueto might've turned Thursday's game into a blowout five batters into the game — he might've benefited from another rehab start in Sacramento with his Fatherhood Bling co-stars — but it's safe to assume that the new Cueto will be back with his old hits soon enough.

Orlando Cepeda returned to AT&T Park for the first time since he suffered a stroke and fell back on Feb. 19. Just coincidence, he said, that it was a game between two teams for which he played.

He hasn't missed watching a Giants game on TV, and every member of his "Giants family" has been with him throughout the recovery.

At the time of the incident, Cepeda was in the Bay Area to introduce Juan Marichal at the 19th annual Multi-Ethnic Sports Hall of Fame. Marichal ended up at Cepeda's side in his hospital room during his three days in an induced coma. Marichal was one of few that could reach him.

"He kissed him and said 'Brother, I'm here, do something for me'" said Ali, Cepeda's son.

Cepeda answered by moving his toes.

"It's a battle every day," Ali said. "He's a fighter, he's still got some good years left in him. He was trying to take some swings with his cane earlier."

ESPN.com

Giants getting healthy might mean trouble for other NL contenders

David Schoenfield

A few observations from the St. Louis Cardinals-San Francisco Giants game, an 11-2 St. Louis win:

- This was Johnny Cueto's return from the disabled list, but Cardinals starter Luke Weaver stole the show with 5⅓ perfect innings, before Gorkys Hernandez beat out an infield hit. (Alen Hanson followed one out later with a two-run homer.) Those were the only hits Weaver allowed over eight innings. Weaver has had a rocky first half with a 4.92 ERA and has had trouble going deep into games, so this was a much-needed effort to get through six innings and then some. I still like his stuff, although he needs to improve the curveball, and he'd be near the top of my list of pitchers I expect to improve in the second half.

Giants' Cueto roughed up in first game back

It was a rocky return for Giants starter Johnny Cueto, who gave up four runs in the first inning Thursday night against the Giants, one more than he had in 32 innings before going out with right elbow inflammation.

Fourth of July standings check: Who's sizzling and who's fizzling

Are the Nats really this bad? Can the Mariners keep winning one-run games? And what about that AL East race? Our experts weigh in.

- Cueto, meanwhile, was roughed up, as the Cardinals knocked him around for four runs right off the bat, including a Jedd Gyorko home run, and then Matt Carpenter homered in the second. The Giants are only a game over .500 and have been outscored by 32 runs, but they have to be reasonably happy at just 3½ games out of first place, considering Cueto and Madison Bumgarner have made just six starts apiece. Jeff Samardzija is slated to return from the DL on Saturday.

- The more I see Harrison Bader, the more I like him. He is an impressive athlete, with excellent speed and defense in right field (his plus-14 defensive runs saved are second among all MLB outfielders), plus some pop from a compact frame.

As a bonus, he has some of the best hair in the game and just looks cool out there. The question has always been whether he'll hit -- his control of the strike zone is a weak point -- but he's now at .274/.339/.423. He hadn't homered since May 30 and Cardinals right fielders were abysmal in June, but I'd just let this kid play and see how the bat develops. They need his defense, and I like the energy and enthusiasm he brings.

- Carpenter is still so underappreciated. Everyone wanted to write him off after that terrible start, yet here he is, hitting .264/.373/.517 with 16 home runs.

- The Giants still feel a bat short to me. They're without Evan Longoria, but he had a .278 OBP before his injury. They've actually received surprising production from Hanson and Hernandez, or they'd really be in trouble. Hunter Pence is cooked and Buster Posey simply isn't a big power threat anymore (five home runs). They could slide Hanson to second base, where Joe Panik hasn't hit, and look for a left fielder.

- In other words, this could be a season when the Giants sneak into a wild card and then Bumgarner and Cueto get hot in the postseason and Pablo Sandoval hits like six home runs and the Giants win another World Series.