



SF Giants Press Clips Monday, July 2, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants beat Diamondbacks to complete sweep at Chase
Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — The fear of failure drives athletes more than fans know. Succeeding at the professional level in any sport is hard, for a player or team.

Although they would never say it aloud, the Giants came to Chase Field knowing a really bad weekend would have left them 8½ games out of first place in the National League West.

That was not on the agenda. Instead, the Giants steamrolled the first-place Diamondbacks during a three-game sweep at a park that had not been kind to them of late, winning 9-6 Sunday to end a series that will be remembered as a vital turning point if they truly make something of the 2018 season.

To heck with 8½ games back. Try 2½ behind after moving five games above .500 for the first time this season.

Nobody understood the perils of a potential lost weekend more than the skipper.

“You just don’t want to create such an uphill climb,” Bruce Bochy said. “The guys came in here really focused and played good baseball.”

The Giants won the first two games with dominating starts from Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez. Then, with Derek Holland getting knocked out in the fourth inning Sunday, they cranked up the offense and withstood Arizona's charge.

"That's what has to happen to have a good year," Bochy said. "Occasionally you're not going to have your starter have a good game, and you have to slug it against the other team."

Ten Giants had hits, led by Nick Hundley's three. Six had RBIs, with Joe Panik and Brandon Belt each delivering two scoring hits.

Backbenchers Austin Jackson and Hunter Pence had huge pinch hits. Pence pulled a two-run double into the left-field corner against reliever Silvino Bracho to cap a four-run fifth, with most of the damage against starter Zack Godley.

Jackson's leadoff double in the ninth led to an insurance run that Brandon Crawford knocked in with a double.

Even Holland scored a run after he doubled for his first left-handed hit this year.

Despite the offense, the Giants saved the day with one of their best defensive plays of the year.

They had a 4-3 lead when Cory Gerrin relieved Holland in the fourth. The bases were loaded with two outs when Gerrin's only hitter, Christian Walker, rolled a hard groundball down the first-base line.

Belt was playing well off the bag and had to get his size-15 feet moving as fast as he could to get behind the base and backhand the ball. In one motion he turned and fired a high throw that Gerrin leaped to catch before he landed on the bag ahead of the runner for the third out.

"That was a big, big play in the game," Pence said. Belt "covered a lot of ground. He had to make that jump-hook-shot throw to Cory, and Cory had to be the wide receiver flying through the air. That's a lot tougher play than it looks."

Hey, sweep the first-place team and you get to borrow from two sports to paint one image.

The trip continues at another ballpark that has bedeviled the Giants. They have lost 11 of 13 at Coors Field since the start of 2017 and might lack two regulars Monday.

Third baseman Pablo Sandoval had to leave in the third inning after Godley drilled his right elbow with a pitch. X-rays were negative, but the Panda was mighty sore after the game. Bochy had planned to rest him anyway in the series opener against the Rockies.

Center fielder Gorkys Hernandez slammed a foul ball off his left ankle and might not be able to play, either. Bochy had hoped Hernandez could play all three at Coors to use his speed in the vast outfield.

The Giants used six relievers Sunday, not ideal ahead of three games in Denver. But Pierce Johnson helped immensely by providing two shutout innings before Paul Goldschmidt, largely neutralized in the series, got him for a two-run homer.

Holland, who has turned self-flagellation into an art, was not happy he made the bullpen work that hard, which was inevitable after he needed 59 pitches to finish the first two innings.

“To have the month I just had, it’s upsetting,” Holland said, “but I know I’m going to bounce right back. The best part is what these guys did. They picked me up. They got us the ‘W,’ which is important against these guys.”

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants Bumgarner hopes to erase goose egg at the plate

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — Every time **Madison Bumgarner** approaches the plate at AT&T Park, the crowd buzzes because everyone wants to see him hit a home run. He has 17, most by any active pitcher.

When Bumgarner suits up for Monday night’s start at Coors Field, he would just like to get any old hit. He is 0-for-12 with seven strikeouts and a sacrifice fly since his return from a broken hand.

“I haven’t thought about it much, but it would be nice to get on the board,” Bumgarner said Sunday. “I’ve been up a few times with a chance to drive in some runs. If I don’t get a hit, I just want to make a productive out.”

Bumgarner has had as many as 19 hits in a season (2015) and at least three homers in each of the past four seasons. The Giants could use his production because all the starters are making a great case for the universal DH.

Giants pitchers rank last in the National League with a .058 average, 9-for-154, with Derek Holland doubling for the ninth hit Sunday. They’re also ninth in sacrifice bunts with 13. What typically has been a strength for the Giants is now a huge weakness.

The hottest-hitting pitcher in the league is a reliever, Cincinnati's Michael Lorenzen, who has homered in three consecutive at-bats, including a grand slam against Milwaukee as a pinch-hitter Saturday night.

Bumgarner is impressed, but not surprised. He pitched to Lorenzen in 2015 and thought he was looking at a position player.

Bumgarner does not blame his .000 batting average on an inability to practice hitting during his rehab.

"I won't say that at all," he said. "You build a little bit of a reputation. The league sees what you can hit or not and adjusts. It's all about adjustments, and I have to adjust."

Signing day: Monday is an important day for the Giants. The 2018-19 international signing period begins, and the Giants will escape the penalty box for surpassing their bonus slot in 2015 to sign Bahamian **Lucius Fox**, since traded to the Rays.

For two years the Giants could not offer a bonus to any single player above \$300,000. Now, they can spend their roughly \$5 million pool any way they want, and they plan to make some high-impact moves.

"For sure, we will be active," general manager **Bobby Evans** said.

Baseball America reports the Giants will sign one of the big prizes in this year's class, Dominican shortstop **Marco Luciano**. The publication also has the Giants signing Cuban outfielder **Jairo Pomares** and Venezuelan outfielder **Luis Matos**.

Briefly: The Giants still have a poor road record at 19-26, but their four series wins have come against tough competition: the Angels (who were hot at the time), Braves, Nationals and Diamondbacks. Their three series they have swept all have been against contenders: the Braves and Diamondbacks on the road, the Phillies at home. ... The Giants' 2.69-ERA improvement from May to June was the second best for those months in big-league history. Only the 2002 A's had a better improvement, but barely, at 2.70. ... The Giants earned their first sweep at Chase Field since 2016.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Sandoval leaves game after taking pitch to right elbow

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — Giants third baseman Pablo Sandoval was forced to leave Sunday's game against the Diamondbacks after he was hit on the right elbow in the third inning by a Zack Godley pitch.

Alen Hanson replaced Sandoval at third base for the bottom of the inning.

Sandoval was hit during a two-run rally that gave the Giants a 3-2 lead. He immediately went into a crouch after he was hit and spent a good while talking to manager Bruce Bochy and head athletic trainer Dave Groeschner before taking first base.

There was no immediate word on the nature or severity of his injury.

MORE GIANTS: Team ends stellar June with shutout of first-place Diamondbacks

Manager Bruce Bochy said before the game he planned to give Sandoval a day off Monday for the series opener at Denver.

Bochy praised Sandoval's work before the game, saying, "He's amazing. He's got so much energy. We got a big hit from him (Saturday) night. It was huge. I think he's been doing a really nice job defensively too. He's been really good. That's why he's out there."

San Jose Mercury News

Giants break out the brooms, sweep first-place D'backs on the road

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—As the calendar flipped to July, the Giants waved goodbye to their most successful month in two years, an 18-win June that featured a return to the formula that's become a hallmark of Bruce Bochy's most successful clubs.

They won with pitching and defense and they kept up with a torrid pace set by the D'backs and Dodgers.

The Giants didn't use that recipe Sunday, but good teams must win in more ways than one and

San Francisco proved it could with a 9-6 victory that capped off a three-game sweep of first-place Arizona.

With their first sweep at Chase Field since September 9-11, 2016, the Giants pulled within 2.5 games of the D'backs in the National League West and improved to a season-best five games above .500.

Though the Giants' .409 road winning percentage entering Sunday's contest was the second-worst in the league, they've now won eight of their last 14 away from AT&T Park while ripping off 10 total wins in their last 12 games.

The club received an early scare after third baseman Pablo Sandoval was forced to exit Sunday's matinee following a hit by pitch in the top of the third. Sandoval was diagnosed with a right elbow contusion and X-Rays were negative, but Bochy indicated before Sunday's contest he planned to rest the infielder in Monday's series opener in Colorado anyway.

Though Sandoval left early, D'backs starter Zack Godley didn't last much longer as the Giants grinded him down with a disciplined approach throughout a four-inning outing that helped them dig into the D'backs bullpen.

Godley opened the second inning with a location mistake on a fastball that ran inside and hit catcher Nick Hundley in the back. Though Hundley was the only Giant to score in that frame, San Francisco added on with two more in the third and a run in the fourth before finally breaking the game open with a four-run fifth inning.

After Godley walked the first two hitters in the fifth, second baseman Joe Panik brought in Alen Hanson with a single to knock the D'backs starter out of the game. Reliever Silvino Bracho was greeted with a loud two-run double into the corner from Hunter Pence, who picked up his first RBIs as a pinch hitter this season.

After Brandon Belt added on with his second hit of the afternoon, the Giants held a commanding 8-3 lead and needed 15 outs from their bullpen to finish off the D'backs. Belt was one of three Giants who reached base four times, joining Hundley and left fielder Austin Slater.

A well-rested crew of relievers proved pivotal for San Francisco, as the efforts of rookie starters Andrew Suárez and Dereck Rodríguez in the first two games of the series eased the burden on the Giants' bullpen.

Though starter Derek Holland lasted just 3 2/3 innings in his second-shortest outing of the season, the Giants escaped a bases-loaded jam in the fourth after Belt and reliever Cory Gearrin combined for an excellent defensive play on a Christian Walker groundball.

Even though rotation spots are at a premium for the Giants with the impending returns of Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija, Holland will likely remain a fixture as a starter after playing a leading role in the resurgence of the team's staff in June.

The offensive outburst highlighted how dangerous the Giants lineup is against right-handed starters, as San Francisco surged throughout the month of June against righties. Their victory Sunday marked their 15th win in their last 18 games against a right-handed pitcher, and it came against a D'backs pitcher who has failed to last past the fourth inning in each of his last two games against the Giants.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants inching up in National League West thanks to familiar formula

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—A rookie tossed 6 1/3 innings of scoreless ball and three hitters blasted home runs, but the Giants received another meaningful effort from someone who didn't even step on the field in a 7-0 shutout of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Third base coach Ron Wotus, who manages the Giants' defensive shifts and works daily with the team's infielders, had his best game of the season.

"It seemed like when they hit it, there was somebody there regardless of where the ball was hit," starter Dereck Rodríguez said. "In the outfield and in the infield, there was one that passed right by me that I thought was a base hit right up the middle and Crawford was there."

After Saturday's win, Wotus brushed off his role in the Giants success, suggesting the team's shifts and defensive alignments have been strong all season. While Wotus didn't want to steal the credit, the Giants' starting pitcher and manager understood how critical an effective defensive strategy was to limiting the D'backs opportunities.

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"It's a big part of baseball," manager Bruce Bochy said. "We certainly think our guys are doing a

great job of information and Ronny does a great job there. You're going to get beat by a shift, that's the tough part about a shift is sometimes you'll get a routine ball and you may notice that but it's the game like last night that really stands out."

Rodríguez highlighted a pair of groundballs hit by D'backs slugger Paul Goldschmidt that led to outs, citing Crawford's play up the middle to take away a base hit and another diving stop by first baseman Brandon Belt that robbed Goldschmidt of a chance to reach base.

With Goldschmidt at the plate, the Giants moved Belt about 30 feet off the first base line, which is as far from his normal alignment that he's played all season. That decision paid off when the Arizona first baseman laced a ball to the right side of the infield that Belt nabbed. He stood up and underhanded the ball to Rodríguez for a big out.

"It saves hits and you know, it's a good thing to have position players where they hit them," Rodríguez said.

Bochy also credited bench coach Hensley Meulens for his work with aligning outfielders on a night when the Giants picked up two outfield assists.

Though left fielder Alen Hanson and center fielder Gorkys Hernández weren't shaded away from their normal positions on plays they recorded assists, their hustle helped the Giants take away a pair of potential scoring opportunities for the D'backs.

With their 10th shutout win of the season, the Giants picked up their 18th win of June to secure their best record in an individual month since the franchise won 21 games in May 2016. After a miserable month for the starting staff in May, improvements from Andrew Suárez and Derek Holland coupled with the emergence of Rodríguez helped the Giants post an NL-best 2.70 ERA in June.

The formula of pitching and defense isn't new for a Giants team that made those areas the staples of World Series clubs earlier in the decade, but it's a recipe that appeared to have been washed from the records for the better part of two seasons.

After earning their fourth road series victory of 2018 Saturday, the Giants closed their deficit to 3.5 games behind the first-place D'backs and moved into a virtual tie for second-place with the Dodgers. At 44-40, the Giants are also four games over .500 for the first time since they were 19-15 following a three-game sweep of the Braves May 6.

There's plenty of work left to do for the Giants to earn a playoff berth, but an improving defense and a deeper pitching staff are necessary assets Bochy hopes he'll have at his disposal for the rest of the summer.

Though the Giants have tough decisions to make regarding their rotation as Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija near returns to the starting staff, the simple truth that these decisions are difficult shows how their fortunes have changed over the last month.

MLB.com

Giants join small club with sweep in Arizona

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- The Giants are heading to high-altitude Colorado with perhaps the perfect prescription for Coors Field.

Their bullpen is rested. Their offense is rolling after the work it has done the last four games. And the road has smoothed considerably.

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The Giants rapped out 16 hits while completing a sweep of National League West leader Arizona with a 9-6 victory at Chase Field on Sunday. They are the only team that has taken a series from the D-backs since May 28, and they have done it twice to get within 2 1/2 games of the division lead.

"We feel like we are in a good rhythm," said **Hunter Pence**, who contributed a key pinch-hit double in a four-run fifth inning that gave Giants an 8-3 lead.

"We feel like we are working on all cylinders, and that's momentum. We feel it right now."

Joe Panik and **Brandon Belt** had two hits and two RBIs apiece and **Nick Hundley** had three hits as the offense continued a recent trend. The Giants have at least 12 hits in three of their last four games, including an even dozen in a 7-0 victory Saturday when none of their late-inning relievers were needed.

Manager Bruce Bochy dipped into the back end of the his bullpen Sunday, using **Sam Dyson**, **Tony Watson** and **Will Smith** after a **Paul Goldschmidt** homer brought Arizona within 8-5 in the seventh inning, but the group will head to Colorado not overly taxed.

"Pence, that was a huge hit," Bochy said.

"Pitching. Timely hitting, too. Our defense. Everything. You win all three, you better play really good ball, especially against this team. The bullpen. Overall a really great series."

The Giants, who entered the series with an NL-low 16 road victories, became the second team with a sweep in Arizona this season. They have a four-game road winning streak after taking the final game of a series in Dodger Stadium on June 17.

"The Giants are a hot team right now," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said.

"You can just tell by the way they're approaching the ball. You can tell by the way they're grinding out at-bats. They had a really good game plan today against **Zack Godley**. They put a lot of pressure on our pitchers throughout the weekend."

Next up, a Colorado team that took two of three from the Dodgers over the weekend to close to within six games of Arizona in the NL West. The Giants and Dodgers are in a virtual tie, 2 1/2 games back with two weeks to play before the All-Star break.

Bochy pointed to the six-game trip as an important step before finishing the pre-break schedule with a 10-game homestand.

"You are playing a team in front of you and a team that is playing well, it is important that we play well," Bochy said.

"You just don't want to create such an uphill climb. This team in here is focused and really playing great baseball."

The sweep in Arizona was an indicator of the Giants' ability to rise to the occasion. They have swept NL East-leading Atlanta on the road and have taken two of three at the Angels and at Washington.

"It says a lot about this club that they can make their play when they need to," Bochy said.

"Some things are hard to explain, but these guys knew they had to come in here and play well."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Acrobats get the out: Belt and right-hander **Cory Gerrin** combined on a nifty play to get the Giants out of a bases-loaded situation in the fourth inning to maintain their 4-3 lead.

With two outs, **Christian Walker** hit a grounder behind the first-base bag that Belt caught on a

hop and shoveled a throw to Gearrin, who reached up and caught the throw just ahead of Walker.

Pence described it best: "That was a very difficult play. [Belt] covered a lot of ground. Had to do the jump-hook-shot throw to Cory, and Cory had to be the wide receiver flying through the air. That's a much tougher play than it looks. That's a big, big play in the game."

What a relief it is: Left-hander Smith struck out **Jake Lamb** with runners on second and third in the ninth inning for his second save of the series and second of the season, and while he appears to be the closer du jour, nothing is official.

"We're going to use everybody," Bochy said. "They are all late-inning guys. Once we get to that point with [lefty] Lamb up, that was a no-brainer. I like the fact we have these guys that are interchangeable. They can pitch the seventh, eighth. Even the sixth. We'll mix it up."

Dyson, who failed to hold an 8-7 lead in the ninth inning of a 9-8 loss to Colorado on Thursday, pitched the seventh inning Sunday. Watson pitched in the eighth inning in a 2-1 victory Friday and pitched the eighth again Sunday. **Reyes Moronta** had the seventh inning Friday.

"We all kind of consider ourselves closers down there," Smith said. "You're either the closer of the sixth inning or the closer of the seventh inning or the closer of the eighth inning. Just one guy happens to throw the ninth.

"I feel like as a bullpen if everybody keeps that mentality, everybody will stay sharp and just try to hand it to the next guy. It's as simple as that."

HE SAID IT

"I'm good. My hand was numb. Nothing serious. A little scared, but it's fine." -- *Giants third baseman **Pablo Sandoval**, who was removed from the game in the bottom of the third inning after being struck in the right elbow in his plate appearance in the top of the inning***UP NEXT**

Madison Bumgarner will start in Colorado on Monday for the first time since that skid on a rented dirt bike cost him two months of the 2017 season. He enters the clash with the Rockies riding a 16-inning scoreless streak, including eight shutout innings in a win over San Diego on June 21 and seven in a no-decision against the Rockies on Wednesday. Colorado counters with **Kyle Freeland**, who's 2-0 with a 1.89 ERA in three starts against the Giants this season.

MLB.com

Pitch to elbow forces Sandoval to exit game

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- Giants third baseman **Pablo Sandoval** was removed from Sunday's **9-6 win over the D-backs** in the bottom of the third inning after being hit by a pitch in the right elbow in his plate appearance in the top of the inning.

He was diagnosed with a right elbow contusion. X-rays were negative.

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"I'm good," Sandoval said after the game. "My hand was numb. Nothing serious. A little scared, but it's fine."

Sandoval went to his haunches while walking toward first base after being hit and was attended to by athletic trainer Dave Groeschner as manager Bruce Bochy also went onto the field to check. **Alen Hanson** took over at third base in the bottom of the frame.

Sandoval, hitting .266, has been the primary third baseman since **Evan Longoria** went out with a fractured finger, starting 13 of the last 14 games.

He had four hits in 14 at-bats in the previous three games, including a two-run single in a 7-0 victory Saturday, and singled in the second inning in his first at-bat Sunday.

"He's amazing," San Francisco manager Bruce Bochy said before the game. "He has so much energy. I think he's been doing a really nice job defensively. He's been really good. That's why he's been out there."

Sandoval already was likely to get Monday off in Colorado, Bochy said before the game.

MLB.com

Rodriguez adds to Giants' tough choices

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- This rotation thing may be getting complicated. Good-complicated.

On Saturday, right-hander **Dereck Rodriguez** became the second San Francisco rookie in as many nights to make his case for a continued spot in the rotation, even as the return of **Johnny Cueto** and **Jeff Samardzija** is imminent.

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Rodriguez threw 6 1/3 scoreless innings and was backed by homers from **Brandon Crawford**, **Andrew McCutchen** and **Joe Panik** in a 7-0 victory over Arizona, the Giants' ninth win in their last 11 games.

Rodriguez, who made his first start June 3, has given up six runs in 25 innings over his last four starts, with two wins and two no-decisions in Giants victories.

The present has been solid.

The future is not something to sweat.

"I don't think about that," Rodriguez said. "Just go out there and do what I know how to do best, and that's pitch good games. Whatever happens happens. I'm just enjoying myself right now.

"Whatever they decide, that's their decision."

Rodriguez's outing continued a streak of strong Giants pitching performances, including a 2-1 victory by fellow rookie **Andrew Suarez** on Friday in the first game of the series at Arizona.

The Giants have given up two runs or fewer in five of their last six games, and Rodriguez has had a hand in two of them. He gave up four hits and one run in seven innings of a no-decision in a 3-2, 11-inning victory over San Diego on Sunday.

Rodriguez gave up six hits, struck out five and walked two Saturday, when the Giants took their second straight series from the D-backs, the only opponent to have won a series from Arizona in its last 10.

The Giants took two of three from the D-backs at AT&T Park from June 4-6. Arizona is 6-0-2 in

its other eight series since May 28.

D-backs right-hander **Shelby Miller**, making his second start since returning from Tommy John surgery, gave up six runs in five innings, including four in the third when San Francisco batted around.

The Giants are embracing the options that Rodriguez and Suarez present as they prepare to welcome back Cueto and Samardzija. Cueto will throw a bullpen session Monday in Sacramento, after which his next start -- rehab or Majors -- will be determined. Samardzija could rejoin the rotation as early as next weekend after a Monday rehab start, his fourth.

"I can't tell you what we are going to do," manager Bruce Bochy said. "We'll answer that when we have to. Just proud of these kids, the way they are pitching. Come into this park and throw the ball like that, that's impressive.

"We want our guys back, but at the same time when they are throwing like this, it does give you the luxury of making sure that the guys are ready. Depth is going to be so important. We're only at the halfway point. You never know what can happen. This has been great the way Suarez and Rodriguez have come up and handled themselves."

Rodriguez mixed four pitches, and threw some cut fastballs later in the game to keep the D-backs from honing in.

"We knew that it would be front to back with that changeup," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said. "He started to throw a curveball and a cutter in the middle innings and it seemed like he had four pitches working. His fastball was in two different areas, three different areas of the plate. So it was one of those special days where I feel like he had everything going in a really good direction."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

D-ing it up: The Giants used a couple of nice defensive plays to keep the D-backs at bay while the game was close early.

Left fielder **Alen Hanson** bobbled **David Peralta's** double down the left-field line with two outs in the first inning but recovered in time to make a quick throw back to the infield to catch Arizona baserunner **Jake Lamb** off third base.

Center fielder **Gorkys Hernandez** cut off **Ketel Marte's** single to left-center with one out in the second inning and threw a strike to Panik at second to retire Marte attempting to stretch it into a double.

"That does so much for the pitchers when you make plays like that," Bochy said. "Saves pitches. Gets guys off base. Defense played a big role."

Going deep: Crawford hammered a curveball into the seats to open the scoring in the second inning, and that bought him enough respect to earn a four-pitch, bases-loaded walk to drive in the first run of the four-run third inning. **Pablo Sandoval** followed Crawford's walk with the biggest hit in the third, a single up the middle on a 95 mph fastball to drive in the middle two runs. **SOUND SMART**

The Giants had three homers in a game for the first time since they hit four against the D-backs on June 4 (McCutchen, Crawford, Sandoval and **Nick Hundley**). **HE SAID IT**

"I think they are gaining confidence and we are able to come up with a game plan and they are able to execute it. It's been fun to watch the progression, and hopefully much more of that to come." -- catcher **Buster Posey**, on what he has seen from Rodriguez and Suarez in recent starts

UP NEXT

The Giants will look to keep rolling after their best month in two years when left-hander **Derek Holland** starts the final game of a three-game series at Arizona on Sunday. Holland is coming off arguably his best start of the season, giving up one run and striking out a season-high eight in a season-high 6 2/3 innings of a 3-2 victory over Colorado.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants make a statement with weekend sweep of D'backs: 'It says a lot about this club
Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — There were three directions this weekend could have gone for the Giants.

They could have fallen alarmingly far back in the National League West. They could have floated in place. Or they could have made a statement.

With a 9-6 win on Sunday, the Giants certainly made a statement. They swept the first-place Diamondbacks behind two rookie pitchers and an offense that came alive in the finale, getting within 2 1/2 games of the lead in the National League West. The Los Angeles Dodgers, preseason favorites in the division, are also 2 1/2 back of the Diamondbacks as the teams get into the second half of the schedule.

"I said coming into this road trip it was an important road trip because you're playing the team in front of you," manager Bruce Bochy said. "It was important we played well. You don't want to create such an uphill climb. These guys came in and played good baseball. These guys knew

they had to come in here and play well. It says a lot about this club that they can elevate their game when they need to."

The Giants have just 19 road wins, but they have shown a strange ability to show up against the better clubs. Their four road series victories have come against the Angels, Braves, Nationals and Diamondbacks. The latest one was the most complete of the year, and not just because it was a sweep. The Giants took the first two games behind rookie pitchers, Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez, but Derek Holland had an off day on Sunday. His command was lacking after a hot two-month stretch, but the lineup picked Holland up with 16 hits.

Brandon Belt had two hits and three walks. Nick Hundley reached base four times. Austin Slater did the same. Brandon Crawford drove in a huge insurance run. Even Hunter Pence got into the mix with a two-run pinch-hit double. The rest kept the line moving and did the little things.

It was a win with contributions from up and down the roster, and the biggest out might have come from a Giant who has barely seen the field in recent weeks. Cory Gearrin pitched just twice in the previous 17 games but Bochy called on him with the bases loaded and two outs in the fourth. Gearrin got a roller toward first and Bochy feared it would sneak into the outfield like Pence's walk-off last Sunday. But Belt covered a ton of ground and made a deft off-balance flip back to Gearrin for the out at first.

"It was a jump-hook shot, and Cory was the wide receiver," Pence explained.

The Giants mostly cruised home from there. Mark Melancon ran into some trouble in the ninth, but Will Smith entered and retired the potential tying run with runners on the corners.

As he walked off the field, Bochy was left to take inventory. Pablo Sandoval was pulled early with an elbow contusion but an X-ray was negative and he should be back in a day or two. Gorkys Hernandez might need a day off after fouling a ball off his ankle, but Bochy doesn't think that one is serious, either. The bullpen might be in need of a boost after a couple games at Coors Field, but for now, the manager thinks the group will be alright.

It's a room that is gaining confidence -- "momentum," Pence said -- and now will try to avoid the sand traps that have popped up on every trip. On the last trip to Denver, the Giants looked just about done. Now they're a season-high five games above .500, and Bochy likes their chances at Coors Field after watching the lineup grind out at-bats on Sunday.

"You've got to slug it with the other club occasionally," he said. "They did that."

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants within striking distance of first in NL West after sweep of D'backs

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — For a couple of weeks now, when asked about the home-heavy schedule the Giants have before the trade deadline, Bruce Bochy has nodded and then pivoted. He likes to point out that no matter how many games this team has at home this month, none of it will matter if the road numbers don't turn.

This weekend, the Giants turned around their road fortunes, and the timing couldn't have been better. A 9-6 win over the Diamondbacks clinched a series sweep that got the Giants within 2 1/2 games of first place. That's the closest they have been June 10. The Giants still are well below .500 on the road, but they have won eight of their last 14 games away from AT&T Park. Here are the details from the latest win...

--- Cory Gearrin had pitched just twice in the previous 17 games, but Bruce Bochy put him in a tough spot. Gearrin came on with the bases loaded and two outs in the fourth and got Christian Walker to ground out to first. Brandon Belt ranged far toward the line to snag the ball and made a deft flip back to the bag, where Gearrin was waiting.

--- Pablo Sandoval was hit by a pitch in the third inning and left the game after running the bases. X-rays were negative, and the Giants announced that Sandoval has a right elbow contusion. Alen Hanson took over at third.

--- Hunter Pence didn't drive in a run in his first 12 pinch-hit at-bats this season, but he lined a two-run double down the line in the fifth to give the Giants a 7-3 lead.

--- Paul Goldschmidt hit a two-run blast in the seventh to get the Diamondbacks within three. The homer was Goldschmidt's 21st in 127 games against the Giants. Nolan Arenado has 23 homers against the Giants.

--- Austin Slater had three hits on Friday night and two more Sunday. He also drew two walks in the finale. With two lefties on deck in Denver, Slater should get a nice run of playing time here. Should.

--- It was a poorly-timed rough start for Derek Holland, who gave up seven hits and three runs in 3 2/3 innings. This came after rookies Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez dominated the same lineup. The decisions become more interesting by the game...

The Athletic

Forgotten men lead Giants to a series sweep in Arizona

Andrew Baggarly

PHOENIX — They wore wide-brimmed hats, and not to make a fashion statement.

It was mid-morning on Saturday and already approaching 100 degrees in the Tonto National Forest east of here, and when you are standing in the middle of a river, there is no place to escape the beating sun.

Nick Hundley stood on one paddleboard. Mark Melancon, his former teammate at the University of Arizona and current teammate with the Giants, stood on another.

“You know, I love talking baseball with him,” Hundley said. “He’s really smart. He loves the strategy of the game. I think he loves going out there and trying to get people out different ways. I’ve talked about baseball with him for the last 12 or 13 years. It’s nice to be in the same room talking about it.”

Out on the river, though, in their flip-flops and board shorts, they were not talking about baseball.

“Nah,” said Hundley, laughing. “I was trying to push him in.”

Every major league season is a 162-act play, and the cold truth is that some parts will be recast or written out along the way. If the more reactionary fans were the playwrights, they’d kill characters faster than a showrunner on “The Walking Dead.”

Melancon, because of the injuries and the missed time and the general weirdness that has surrounded it all while he is making \$62 million in the second season of a four-year deal, would be one of the first victims. Cory Gearrin would be another. Even Hunter Pence would go, although he’d merit a sweetly tearful farewell scene.

But there are days during every season that remind you: baseball is more complicated than that.

The Giants didn’t merely receive contributions from their bench and bullpen to win 9-6 on Sunday, sweep a three-game series from the Arizona Diamondbacks and move within 2 1/2 games of first place.

They received contributions from forgotten men.

Gearrin had pitched once in a span of 16 games, and then someone sailed to Pitcairn Island to fetch him, and he appeared back-to-back over the weekend here at Chase Field. On Sunday, he stepped into the game’s most important moment — bases loaded and two out in the fourth inning, with the Giants leading by a run — and not only dotted his slider to Christian Walker, but had the presence of mind to bolt off the mound to cover first base after Brandon Belt ranged to make an impressive stop.

Pence had his moment, too, while proving he can be a useful member of this team even if all he’s asked to do is pinch hit. He fiddled with his stance while getting down in a crouch and

ripped a two-run double down the left field line that opened up the game in the fifth inning. It was Pence's first extra-base hit to his pull side since he doubled off Clayton Kershaw on Opening Day at Dodger Stadium.

As much as Pence's walk-off squibber on the last homestand turned into a personal celebration for all he has accomplished and all that he means to his teammates and his city, the hard-hit double to his pull side was a much more encouraging sign.

"Hunter getting that pinch-hit double to open the game up, and Cory keeping the lead in the fourth ..." Hundley said. "I mean, those were the two keys of the game."

Come to think of it, said Giants manager Bruce Bochy, the ground ball that Belt deftly fielded in the fourth was almost identical to the line-hugging roller that Pence coaxed through to beat the Padres last week.

The Giants are getting a few breaks. And they are playing well enough to deny those same breaks to their opponents. As a result, they are five games over .500 for the first time this season.

"You know, I think we're coming together as a team," Hundley said. "I really do. We're feeding off each other. There's really no open spaces in our lineup. We've really tightened that up. We're playing well, and we're doing it together with everybody contributing."

Backup catchers can be forgotten men as well, but Hundley continues to show his value on days when Buster Posey takes a needed rest. He not only caught nine long innings in a getaway game that took 3 hours, 45 minutes to complete, but he was also on base four times. He collected the two-out hit that tied it for the Giants in the third inning. He hit a crisp double in the eighth. And the best conditioned 35-year-old backup catcher in baseball looked fresh enough to run wind sprints after the handshake line.

Hundley was ready in the ninth to catch Melancon, who had warmed up and was all set to enter a save situation that Brandon Crawford removed when he hit an RBI double to make it a four-run lead in the top of the inning.

This was not the inning that would re-anoint Melancon as the closer. There is too much that remains unknown about the muscular issue in his forearm, which sent him to the disabled list again in the hours before the season opener and required a stem cell injection to try to bring life to gray flesh. How will he respond to a stressful inning? Will he be able to throw on back-to-back days? Can he avoid a setback? The closer needs to be durable, and Melancon's arm remains inscrutable.

But there will come a time when the Giants, out of need or deference or both, give Melancon an opportunity to reassume the role that he is being paid to occupy. And as he works his way toward that end, it cannot hurt to have his old college catcher there to hash through his appearances and provide moral support.

Melancon did not make it through the ninth inning Sunday. He faced five batters and allowed three hits plus a hard lineout to bring the tying run to the plate before left-hander Will Smith was summoned to dispatch Jake Lamb to end it. But only the third hit came on a mistake pitch,

and Melancon appeared to have more bite and tumble on his changeup and curve. He threw one that faded away from Paul Goldschmidt's bat and resulted in a lazy fly out.

"I've been feeling all right," Melancon said. "I think I need to ... I need to put guys away sooner. I think that's the biggest thing. Just get ahead and put 'em away right away."

Said Bochy: "I think the stuff is fine, and Mark is still finding his way a little. That's fair to say. His confidence will grow the more he goes out there. After all the time he's missed, I think he's still trying to get in midseason form."

After the second hit, Hundley came out to talk to Melancon. He put an arm around the right-hander's waist as he spoke. This was not the time to push him in, but to throw him a line.

"The communication with Nick is awesome," Melancon said. "He's a guy who's going to talk through each outing with you. Nick and I go way back so it's just a nice, genuine relationship we have to where we can be on the same page all the time."

"Yeah, it's a difficult game as it is, let alone when you're not 100 percent," Hundley said. "But he's been grinding through it. He's been getting better, getting stronger. I think the more repetitions he gets, the stronger he gets.

"His offspeed stuff, I mean, he threw a couple curveballs that were picking up speed. To get weak contact out of Goldy, one of the best hitters in the league, you've got to be doing something right.

"He's on a nice trajectory, for sure, because when it gets down to the end and he's built up four months of innings, it's going to bode well for us."

Or maybe it won't. The season is unpredictable that way. It's an unscripted series. Maybe Melancon won't hold up or maybe he will, and he becomes a major contributor to a team that keeps demonstrating it will be a factor in the NL West. You don't know when a character will get written out. But as long as they're a part of the clubhouse, you make sure none of them feel ostracized.

Because there will be games like Sunday afternoon when your forgotten men lead you to a sweep of a first-place team.

"It's going to take everybody," Bochy said. "They need to know that. Because we're going to use everybody."

The Athletic

Giants Analytics: Bumgarner is back but Belt isn't, Gorkys mixes luck and skill

Owen Poindexter

It doesn't seem like that long ago that I was sketching out a piece exploring the idea of the Giants blowing up the roster and starting to build the next core. Since then, they've come roaring back, capping this week with a sweep of the division-leading Diamondbacks. They now

sit 2 1/2 games back, and the wild card looks to be in play as well. With half a season in the books and Johnny Cueto coming back soon, the Giants have to be happy with where they are.

Bumgarner being Bumgarner

It looks like Madison Bumgarner is back to being himself. Two no-run, eight-strikeout, two-walk performances have gone a long way to answering concerns that bubbled up after three mediocre starts. I wrote two weeks ago about how he had abandoned his signature high fastball, but that pitch made its return in the last two starts. He isn't using it with the frequency of previous years, but his pitch profile and results are now looking a lot more MadBum-like. He's still not hitting the area just above the zone as often as he did in his heyday, but my guess is that he finds that pitch over his next few starts.

The cutter has emerged as his most versatile pitch, scattering it in the zone behind in the count and down and away (from a righty's perspective) when ahead. It's his only pitch that gets swings and misses in the zone with any regularity. It provides a second pitch that he can use to get called strikes, but it also has a 31.1 percent whiff rate — the highest of any of his pitches. He grooves one occasionally, which has led to the pitch also having the highest slugging percentage. The cutter makes Bumgarner's arsenal more of a spectrum than two distinct weapons (counting the change and curve as one "weapon").

Another way he's returning to his old self is that he's not leaning on his changeup as much. While his change and curve (both used almost exclusively against righties) got good results and a high whiff rate, the way Bumgarner used each provides some insight into what he thinks they are good for. He's thrown 99 pitches to right-handers with two strikes this season. Only one of them was a changeup. It induces weak contact, but he would rather go to his fastball, cutter or curve (which he uses almost equally with two strikes) for strike three.

Can Belt get his new swing back?

Brandon Belt spent most of this season as a changed man. Then he spent a couple of weeks on the disabled list and, since returning, changed back. Here's that story numerically:

Brandon Belt	PA	Launch Angle	Exit Velo	HR/FB	Pull%
2016-17	1106	21	87.6	11.3	37.5
2018 pre-injury	226	22.9	87.6	16.7	44.7
2018 post-injury	58	17.4	84.7	10	34.1

The exit velocity hints that he's not fully recovered. In addition to not hitting the ball as hard, he's not doing what he wants with it, namely launching it toward the right-field bleachers.

Instead, he's been spraying the ball around, which is what some hitters want to do, but Belt thrives by maxing out on power production. The question is if he can get back to his extreme profile or if his season through June 1 will turn out to be an aberration.

My guess is that, assuming a return to full health, he finds his way back to within a tick or two of his pre-injury numbers. The 44.7 percent pull rate is high, but would not even be a career-high for Belt, and would be tied for 34th in the league among regulars. Belt's launch angle is fifth in baseball, but not out of line for his norm. The final piece of the puzzle, HR/FB%, is more volatile, but there's nothing crazy about his pre-injury 16.7 percent figure. That would tie him for 47th in baseball with Matt Carpenter, who has a similar profile this year.

The Gorkys mystery

Little about Gorkys Hernández's season makes sense to me. He's gone from barely-playable speedster to BABIP-inflated speedster to HR/FB%-inflated power hitter. The default, probably correct answer is that he's combining a modest improvement with a lot of luck. It happens. Still, how weird is this?

Gorkys Hernández	Launch Angle	Exit Velo	Avg Distance	Pull%	HR/FB%
2017	8.2	83.7	150 ft.	38.6	0
2018	10.9	86.1	150 ft.	34.9	20.8

The launch angle and exit velocity are both a smidge higher, and his HR/FB has gone from non-existent to slugger. What may be happening here is that Hernández crossed a threshold that allows his luck to play up. With his 2017 averages, a well-hit ball is probably a double or a hard out. Now that he's within shouting distance of 95 mph, he has a better chance of clearing the fence. There is a red flag here, which is that Hernandez is swinging and missing quite a bit more, which has lifted his strikeout rate from 21 percent last year to 27.8 percent this year. It seems he's swinging harder, missing more, and getting better results when he makes contact.

I'd expect his HR/FB rate to come down to around 10-12 percent going forward, and his .362 BABIP to come down to around .320-.330. With his strikeout rate, that's more of a decent hitter than a good one, but that's still a nice gift to a team that has struggled to find a regular center fielder.

ESPN.com

How MLB's analytics revolution is getting to clubhouses

Jerry Crasnick

Before Sam Fuld appeared in 598 major league games and attracted a following as a scrappy outfielder, he earned an economics degree from Stanford University. A few years ago, he would have had two choices upon retirement: Go to work for a big league organization as an outfield-baserunning coach or pursue a job at an investment banking firm on Wall Street.

Now a Plan C career path exists for Fuld. Four months ago, it took him to a conference room at Spectrum Field in Clearwater, Florida, where he spent several days explaining weighted on-base average to 63 Philadelphia Phillies in English and Spanish.

Fuld, 36, joined the Phillies in November as the team's major league player-information coordinator. His mandate is clear: to bridge the divide between the statistical and scouting worlds and dispense knowledge to players who are receptive to new ideas.

MLB organizations are embracing a new reality: Valuable insights can be conveyed every day, and they're more likely to resonate with players when delivered by a front-office member of the uniformed fraternity than a front-office official with a statistics degree and a 2400 SAT score.

"Just having that perspective and having some dirt in my spikes, I think it helps," Fuld said.

As clubhouses trend in a more open-minded direction, players such as Joey Votto, Justin Turner, Daniel Murphy, Josh Donaldson and Jay Bruce have blended new-age thinking and their natural skills for improved performance.

The analytics-as-a-teaching-tool narrative took a quantum leap a year ago, when Logan Morrison, Justin Smoak and Yonder Alonso all went "launch angle" and posted the best power numbers of their careers.

In the constant quest for an edge, teams are adding a new position to help players enter the age of enlightenment. In November, the Red Sox hired Ramon Vazquez as "a liaison between the major league club's advance scouting and statistical analysis efforts for the purpose of presenting information to players and coaches." Alex Cora, Boston's manager, had seen how valuable Alex Cintron was in a similar role with the world champion Houston Astros.

In Anaheim, former MLB closer Andrew Bailey is an assistant to Steve Soliz, the Angels' catching and information coach. Bailey is filling a role similar to the one Brian Bannister has used to help Boston's pitchers.

As the numbers evolve, front offices are making a greater effort to educate players on decisions that go into shaping rosters. Fuld, primarily a backup over eight seasons with the Cubs, Rays, Athletics and Twins, knows what it's like to be waived, be traded, fight for a roster spot and play

a game the same day the charter flight touches down at 3 a.m. Those experiences give him credibility with players in an age of Statcast and evolving defensive metrics.

"It can be difficult as a player to know you're being evaluated on something you're not familiar with," Fuld said. "That shouldn't be the case. Players have the right to know exactly what matters when it comes down to decision-making. It's important for peace of mind and the emotional and mental value of knowing everybody is on the same page. The divide between the front office and the players can often be toxic. I've seen that, and it's not healthy.

"The other key component is determining areas in which players can improve and looking at things players are unaware of. Maybe a pitcher has a really good slider and doesn't know how good it is because he's never been shown the evidence or been shown how many times he's thrown it. The public data is getting better and better, but it's a bit daunting knowing where to look without somebody there to tell you."

Fuld began his individual outreach to players in the Grapefruit League in group meetings also attended by Phillies general manager Matt Klentak, assistant general manager Ned Rice, manager Gabe Kapler and several coaches. The Phillies have a large Latin American representation, so special assistant Jorge Velandia and team translator Diego Etedgui helped fill the gaps for Spanish-speaking players when Fuld delved into runs created plus.

Rhys Hoskins and Scott Kingery were among the players with an interest in hearing Fuld's message. Three months into the season, they've learned they can approach him with questions at their convenience rather than avoid him out of fear he'll try to cram new-age rocket science down their throats.

"If something is glaring, Sam might say, 'Take this for what it's worth, but this is what the statistics are showing, and it's something you can focus on if you want,'" Hoskins said. "Maybe I think I struggle with the inside fastball or sliders in the zone. He shows me, 'Hey, you're hitting .380 on sliders in the strike zone or the fastball in, so go ahead and offer at it.' He's a veteran, and he has multiple years in the game, so I think it carries a little more weight."

Each year, stories emerge about players taking the initiative to improve their performance. Colorado reliever Adam Ottavino benefited from a visit to the Driveline Baseball facility in suburban Seattle and some work on his mechanics and his pitch mix. Former first-rounder Colin Moran revived a flagging career with some swing changes in Pittsburgh after it became clear his approach wasn't cutting it in Houston.

Cleveland pitcher Trevor Bauer was once considered a rogue voice when he arrived in professional ball from UCLA and shared his innovative approach to training and analytics. Now that he's relatively in the mainstream, Bauer expects more organizations to hire uniformed

personnel as conduits, and for coaches to become more proficient in speaking the same language as front offices.

"Now more than ever, you have information about how to improve a player and what he needs to do, but there's a divide because you need to find people who are good at actually coaching and teaching it," Bauer said. "You need people who've played enough to be able to communicate with players and also be able to understand it intellectually and communicate with the front office. It's a rare combination.

"A lot of players don't want to hear about spin rate. But if the coach knows a pitcher's spin rate is down, and he knows how to coach spin rate, he can say, 'Hey, why don't you try this grip on the ball, and if you put a little more tension on it, I think it will help you get the ball down a little bit better.' Or, 'It will give it better shape.' That's stuff players can understand.

"A lot of players don't understand 'X this' or 'Y that'. But they understand, 'Stay behind the ball or try to take the hand to it or see the ball' or whatever. More than ever, that position is important, because baseball is shifting towards analytics. Period. It's not gonna stop. And that's a good thing."

Some players understandably chafe over what they perceive as nitpicking -- particularly from outsiders who have never played the game. Eric Hosmer, no darling of the analytics community, signed a \$144 million contract with San Diego after years of being pilloried for his high ground-ball rate. In his first season with the Padres, Hosmer ranks 12th among MLB first basemen with a .779 OPS and 14th with a 1.2 WAR. He's logging numbers close to his career norms, with a ground-ball rate of 60.4 percent -- third-highest in the majors.

After taking years to refine their approaches, some big leaguers are reluctant to tinker with success. Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich is a .290 career hitter with a Silver Slugger award on his résumé, but he also hears how he could benefit from getting the ball airborne more frequently.

"The FanGraphs and analytics people are always telling me, 'You need to hit more fly balls,'" Yelich said. "Every year, wherever you go, there are guys who come in the locker room and say it. I'm like, 'OK, let me change my swing. How is that going to go?' Nobody knows. A lot of work goes into something like that. It's a big risk, and I feel like the way I've gone about it these first five years is all right.

"Hitting is so hard as it is. I understand no ground ball has ever gone over the fence. That's their biggest argument: 'You can't slug with a ground ball.' Well, nobody is trying to hit ground balls, except for a few guys like Dee Gordon or Billy Hamilton. They don't really mind hitting a ground ball. That's their game. But at the same time, there's a right way to go about trying to drive the ball and have success in the other aspects of the game."

In his role with the Phillies, Fuld routinely plants seeds that could germinate into fully formed ideas. He alerts hitters to numbers that show they have better results against first-pitch fastballs than they realize or reinforce a pitcher's gut instinct that his cutter is effective against lefties.

Mechanical changes are a more collaborative effort. Fuld once trained with Morrison in the offseason, and he knows how many hours of cage work went into the swing changes that helped LoMo hit 38 homers for Tampa Bay last season. If the Phillies think a player could benefit from a swing adjustment, hitting coaches John Mallee and Pedro Guerrero become part of what Fuld calls a more "holistic" approach.

Bailey, in his work with the Angels' pitchers, has found there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Some players welcome input, while others might get bogged down from information overload.

"There's a fine line between pitching according to certain statistics and numbers, and the feel of the game you can't quantify," Bailey said. "We want our players to be able to do a little bit of both."

The Phillies, long perceived as behind the curve analytically, have made changes throughout the organization. The day they hired Fuld, they named former Orioles scout Ben Werthan as their minor league player-information coordinator. Werthan conveys a similar message and trains prospects to think critically on their way to Citizens Bank Park.

"Every year, some of the newer methodology resonates a little bit better with players, and certainly with young guys who are growing up on it," Fuld said. "They probably knew what WAR was when they were 12 or 13 or 14, where it would have been meaningless to someone my age."

When given a pop quiz, Hoskins does an admirable job of explaining wOBA -- a metric that measures a hitter's offensive contribution by assigning values to home runs, triples and so forth. But he picks and chooses the information he incorporates into his daily repertoire. Hoskins doesn't spend much time online checking his BABIP or monitoring his exit-velocity ranking, for one simple reason:

"That's why we have Sam."