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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Johnny Cueto takes step toward returning to rotation

John Shea

WASHINGTON — Still expressing relief that he didn't need Tommy John surgery, Giants right-hander **Johnny Cueto** threw off a mound for the first time since beginning his rehab from an elbow injury.

He threw 35 pitches in the bullpen before Friday's series opener at Nationals Park and said he'd like to return about the time he's eligible to come off the disabled list, which is June 30.

"I want to come back on that day," Cueto said. "I'm just waiting to see what's going to happen with the bullpen (sessions). As you all know, throwing bullpens are totally different from pitching in a game."

The plan is to throw twice more off a mound and then pitch to some Giants hitters. From there, he said he might need just two minor-league rehab starts.

It's a promising outlook for the 32-year-old, who last pitched in a game April 28. An MRI exam showed damage to his ulnar collateral ligament, and he went to Florida to see Dr. **James Andrews**, who recommended rehab over surgery.

"Thank God I won't have to go to surgery," Cueto said. "It was a roller coaster. I had already

made up my mind. I was 100 percent sure that I was going to get the Tommy John surgery. In my mind, that is big.”

Jeff Samardzija (shoulder tightness) also threw off a mound and is much closer to returning than Cueto. After Samardzija’s next throwing session, the team will determine whether he’s ready for a rehab start.

Madison Bumgarner made his first 2018 start Tuesday after his broken finger healed, and the Giants’ top three pitchers have yet to be in the rotation together.

Asked about one day having the projected rotation intact in the season’s second half, Cueto said, “We don’t know. This is baseball. It’s like Russian roulette. You don’t know what you’re going to get. I just hope when I come back, I’m healthy and hope I stay healthy and that we continue playing the baseball we’ve been playing.”

Suarez up, down: Andrew Suarez gave up an infield single to his first batter and retired his next nine batters, four on strikeouts. He was just as dominant as he was when blanking the Phillies over seven innings in his previous start.

Then he lost the feel on his curve and left it up in the zone. Six of his final nine batters reached base, and he was done after 4 1/3 innings.

“I think I ramped up too much, and that’s why the ball was up,” Suarez said. “I’ve got to learn how to keep an even keel all the time.”

San Francisco Chronicle
Sizzling Giants beat Nats 9-5 to open long road trip
John Shea

WASHINGTON - A championship vibe was felt at Nationals Park Friday night, but it had nothing to do with baseball. Or even basketball - Warriors-Cavaliers isn’t necessarily huge here. It was about hockey and a Stanley Cup championship, which the Capitals secured a night earlier.

Much of the sold-out crowd showed up in Caps T-shirts, and the Nationals acknowledged their

hockey brethren with a pregame salute. Clearly, the good times carried over from a festive Thursday night.

At least until the Giants came to bat.

In the opener of a three-city, 10-game trip, the Giants scored four quick runs off Stephen Strasburg and raced to a 9-5 victory, their seventh win in eight games that gave them a winning record for the first time since May 15.

A season-high eight of their 15 hits went for extra bases, including home runs by Andrew McCutchen and Gorkys Hernandez. Brandon Crawford resumed his magnificent stretch of solid contact with two doubles — he's hitting .425 since May 1 — and Alen Hanson got a rare start at third base and showed his stunning speed when legging out a triple and scoring from first on a double.

"I think we just built the momentum off what we did in this past homestand," said McCutchen, citing the Giants' 5-1 record against the Phillies and Diamondbacks. "Keep doing what we've been doing."

The Giants took advantage of Strasburg, who'll have an MRI Saturday after feeling shoulder tightness and getting diagnosed with inflammation. He was pulled after two innings and 35 pitches, and the Nationals used six relievers to finish up.

The Giants led 5-0 after scoring three times off Strasburg and twice off Wander Suero, but their starter, Andrew Suarez, opened with three scoreless innings and retired just four more batters, surrendering four runs — two on Juan Soto's homer and two on Bryce Harper's single.

By the time Game 4 of the NBA Finals tipped off, the Nationals trailed 6-5. Then came the seventh inning, and the Giants rallied for three runs on Pablo Sandoval's single, pinch-hitter Evan Longoria's sacrifice fly and Pence's second RBI hit.

"This is one of our better offensive games because it was everybody doing something to

contribute,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “The thing I liked is we came right back and scored after they scored, and that’s always huge. It’s good to see us tack on.”

Longoria was out of the lineup because, at the outset of a stretch of 17 games without a day off, Bochy wants to give guys breathers. Saturday, Hernandez will rest along with Pence, replaced by Austin Jackson and Mac Williamson. Sunday, it’s McCutchen’s turn.

Hanson is expected to play either short or second Saturday, meaning Crawford or Joe Panik will get a break. Crawford was plunked on the elbow, so he could sit out.

At Nationals Park and throughout the region, the Caps figure to dominate sports talk through the weekend and into Tuesday’s parade and beyond. Nationals manager Dave Martinez vowed to host the Caps at a game in the near future, even offering a few rounds of batting practice.

This isn’t a town that takes a championship for granted. The Redskins’ last Super Bowl victory was in 1991. The Bullets/Wizards haven’t won a title since 1978. The Caps have one now. The Nationals still are waiting.

It’s not like in the Bay Area, where championships can come in bunches. But one is enough to unite a community and prompt teams from other sports to join the celebration. The Nationals and their fans honored the Caps on Friday, but the party wasn’t as good as it could have been, and the Giants made sure of that.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants surge above .500, pound 15 hits to open road trip with win Kerry Crowley

WASHINGTON, D.C.—As the Golden State Warriors sought to clinch the Bay Area’s sixth major professional sports championship of the decade, the franchise that captured the region’s first three attempted to achieve its own important feat with a victory.

For the club that turned even-year titles into a stunning trend, the San Francisco Giants haven’t won much since the Warriors last lost a championship in the summer of 2016.

But after a 9-5 series-opening win over the Washington Nationals Friday, the 32-31 Giants are above .500 for the first time since May 15.

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"I think we're just building momentum off of what we did this last homestand," Andrew McCutchen said. "Guys are swinging the bat well, we're pitching well too. The bullpen has been doing an amazing job. Just carry that momentum into going on the road."

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After a second half freefall in 2016 and a 98-loss season last year, the Giants are playing winning baseball again and were victorious for the seventh time in their last eight games behind an early offensive outburst and a strong performance from a deep bullpen.

"Sure, it's good to be at this point," manager Bruce Bochy said. "But you keep going. You keep marching. The guys are doing a nice job of that. Putting the losses behind them, but also these wins. They're putting those behind them."

McCutchen opened the scoring for the Giants with a first inning shot off of Nationals starter Stephen Strasburg, who was lifted due to an undisclosed injury after surrendering two more runs in the second.

McCutchen's solo blast to left center field was his third home run in his last five games after the Giants right fielder entered the month of June with three total homers.

"We can't look at what we've done in the past or what we're trying to do in the future," McCutchen said. "We're just going to have to focus on right now and go from there."

After first baseman Pablo Sandoval led off the second inning with a double, he scored on an Alen Hanson single to double the Giants lead. Left fielder Hunter Pence followed Hanson with a double to the right center field gap that scored the speedy infielder from first base.

Hanson played third base Friday for the second time in his major league career and allowed Bochy to give Evan Longoria a rest against a tough right-handed starter. With a leadoff triple in the fourth inning, Hanson improved to 6-for-6 since returning from the disabled list last week.

His two-out, two-run game-tying home run allowed the Giants to come from behind and walkoff against the Arizona Diamondbacks Wednesday and he barely missed his sixth home run of the season with a triple off the right field wall. It didn't take long for Hanson to score, though, as center fielder Gorkys Hernández ripped a two-run blast to center field for his seventh home run.

Hernández entered the season with five home runs in parts of five major league seasons and never hit more than eight in a single minor league campaign, but the Giants regular center fielder continues to provide a valuable source of power regardless of where he's slotted into the lineup.

The impressive showing from the Giants offense in the early innings aided the cause of rookie starter Andrew Suárez, who tossed seven innings of shutout ball to defeat the Phillies his last time out.

Suárez was on the verge of losing his spot in the Giants rotation after allowing three first inning runs against the Rockies on May 28, but he finished off four more innings in that outing without giving up an earned run. With three scoreless frames to open his start against the Nationals, the left-hander appeared poised to take another big step in his development.

But Suárez ran into trouble in the bottom of the fourth as 19-year-old Nationals left fielder Juan Soto plopped a two-run homer just over the glove of Pence and into the visiting bullpen beyond the left field fence. After Washington tagged Suárez for three hits including a two-run single from Bryce Harper in the fifth, Bochy strolled to the mound and put the game in the hands of his bullpen.

A quintet of relievers finished off the win for the Giants, but the efforts began with rookie Reyes Moronta who escaped the jam Suárez created in the fifth by inducing a pair of outs in the air.

"It's nice to know we've got the lead and with our bullpen, it's pretty much game over once our bullpen comes in with a lead," Suárez said.

Though the Nationals only added one run after Suárez exited, the Giants' offense continued to surge in the late innings thanks to RBI hits from Sandoval and Pence and a pinch hit sacrifice fly from Longoria.

"It was one of our better offensive games because it seemed like it was everyone doing something to contribute," Bochy said.

The nine runs the Giants scored marked the team's second-highest output on the road this season and the club's most runs away from home since tallying 11 against the Atlanta Braves on May 5. Their win Friday was the team's 13th on the road this season in 33 chances.

"It's good to get the first win," Suárez said. "Especially against this team. I think they're in first place in their division so coming here and getting the first game definitely sets the tone for the series."

San Jose Mercury News

Giants detail plan for Cueto and Samardzija as rookies take the spotlight

Kerry Crowley

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Johnny Cueto said he was 100 percent sure he would need Tommy John surgery to heal his ailing elbow.

But a month after orthopedic surgeon Dr. James Andrews diagnosed him with an elbow sprain instead of a tear, Cueto is throwing again and eager to return from the disabled list as soon as he's eligible on June 30.

"In my mind, God is big and he opted to help me not get the Tommy John and just rehab for a month," Cueto said through translator Erwin Higueros.

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Cueto threw his first bullpen Friday since he was placed on the disabled list at the end of April and threw 35 pitches without pain.

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The right-hander said he would like to throw two more bullpens before facing hitters in a live batting practice setting. If he continues to progress without complications, Cueto said he'll add to his schedule and make a rehab start.

Cueto was one of two Giants starters who threw bullpens Friday, as he joined Jeff Samardzija who is sidelined with right shoulder tightness. Samardzija is on the 10-day disabled list which means the Giants can activate him ahead of Cueto, but manager Bruce Bochy said Samardzija will throw at least one more bullpen before potentially heading to the minors leagues to start a rehab game.

"They're getting close to starting to rehab here," Bochy said. "It's still going to be a little while for Johnny. A little longer than Jeff. But they felt good and that's what's important."

With 62 games in the books, the Giants have 100 left to play and recently added ace Madison Bumgarner to a rotation that's been decimated by injuries. Cueto has missed 41 games and Samardzija has been out for 24, but Bumgarner didn't appear until the 61st game of the regular season due to a fractured pinky he suffered during spring training.

As the Giants' top two right-handed starters continue to work their way back from injuries, San Francisco will rely on a pair of rookies at the start of its series against the Nationals. Lefty Andrew Suárez and righty Derek Rodríguez are slated to pitch the first two games of the series, and they're tasked with helping the Giants hold ground in a tight National League West race.

Suárez and Rodríguez combined to throw 13 innings of one-run ball in the Giants sweep of the Phillies last weekend, but pitching on the road is a tougher challenge for young starters to tackle. Both are scheduled to make two starts on the club's 10-game road trip, but fortunately for the Giants, the duo should feel quite comfortable.

The rookies will both start against the Marlins in Miami next week, the city where Suárez grew up and the area where Rodríguez went to high school. Rodríguez's father Ivan also spent the final two seasons of his Hall of Fame career with the Nationals, so he should be quite familiar with Washington, D.C.

Odd game times call for an odd lineup

The Washington Nationals hold an annual gala and this year, that gala is scheduled for Saturday, June 9.

The Nationals elected to start Saturday's contest at noon and push the start time of Sunday's game back to 4 p.m. EST, which creates a difficult turnaround for two teams that won't finish Friday's contest until late in the evening.

Bochy said he tinkered with the Giants lineup to ease the burden on some of his veterans and Friday's lineup features a slew of left-handed hitters against Nationals starter Stephen Strasburg.

All four infielders are left-handed hitters, including Alen Hanson who will play in his second career game at third base. All five of the Giants outfielders are right-handed, but Bochy did give Hunter Pence a start in left field as Pence is 5-for-18 (.278) lifetime against Strasburg.

1. Joe Panik 2B
2. Buster Posey C
3. Andrew McCutchen RF
4. Brandon Crawford SS
5. Pablo Sandoval 1B
6. Alen Hanson 3B
7. Hunter Pence LF
8. Gorkys Hernández CF
9. Andrew Suárez P

MLB.com

Giants swat Nats with 15 hits to take opener

Chris Haft

WASHINGTON -- Overcoming their long-running Nationals Park jinx, the Giants rained a hail of 15 hits Friday upon Washington, with six players collecting two hits apiece in their 9-5 victory.

San Francisco began its three-city, 10-game journey by sustaining the type of offense that would fortify every team's confidence. And the Giants needed plenty of confidence, having dropped 17 of 22 games here since the start of the 2011 season.

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Andrew McCutchen's first-inning home run off Nationals right-hander **Stephen Strasburg** established the offensive rhythm for the Giants, who built a five-run lead before the Nats scored. **Strasburg left** after the second inning with right shoulder inflammation in what turned into a bullpen game for the Nationals.

For the Giants, **Gorkys Hernandez** hit a two-run homer in the fourth inning, and the irrepressible **Alen Hanson** singled and tripled in his first two at-bats. **Brandon Crawford** lashed a fifth-inning RBI double that helped San Francisco fend off Washington, which narrowed the difference to 6-5 in the sixth. The Giants pulled away in the seventh with three runs, tallying the final one on a **Hunter Pence** single.

Giants starter **Andrew Suarez** looked impressive at the outset, striking out four of the first eight hitters he faced. As dominant as he frequently looked, however, Suarez didn't qualify for the decision due to lasting only 4 1/3 innings.

UP NEXT

Expect third baseman **Evan Longoria** and left fielder **Mac Williamson** to return to the Giants' lineup for Saturday's 9:05 a.m. PT rematch with the Nationals. Manager Bruce Bochy figured that infusing the lineup with some fresh personnel would be a good idea, with a day game following a night game. Right-hander **Dereck Rodriguez** is scheduled to make his third big league appearance and second start for the Giants. The Nationals will counter with left-hander **Gio Gonzalez**, who's 5-5 with a 3.12 ERA.

MLB.com

Cueto on track after first bullpen session

Chris Haft

WASHINGTON -- Giants right-hander **Johnny Cueto** was cautiously optimistic about rehabilitating his ailing elbow quickly enough to rejoin the starting rotation by June 30, the first day he's eligible for activation from the disabled list.

"Baseball's like Russian roulette," Cueto said Friday through interpreter Erwin Higueros after flinging 35 pitches off a bullpen mound in his first throwing session since being sidelined. "You never know what you're going to get."

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Cueto, whom the Giants desperately need at full effectiveness to maximize their chances of contending in the postseason, said he wants to throw two more bullpen sessions and a "light" round or two of batting practice before progressing to a Minor League rehab outing.

"As you know, throwing in the bullpen is different from actually pitching in a game," said Cueto, who's on the 60-day DL with inflammation in his right elbow.

Right-hander **Jeff Samardzija** (shoulder), another veteran mainstay of the rotation, also intensified his throwing program with a bullpen session.

ESPN.com

What you need to know about Shohei Ohtani's injury

Stephanie Bell

The news Friday that dual threat Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels headed to the disabled list with a Grade 2 ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) sprain in his right (throwing) elbow immediately sent ripples through the baseball world. Ohtani's first two months of play as a part of Major League Baseball have been nothing short of electric, but this turn of events leaves us with more questions than answers.

EDITOR'S PICKS

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Angels place Ohtani on DL with sprained UCL

Los Angeles Angels star Shohei Ohtani has been placed on the DL with a sprained UCL in his right arm and will be re-evaluated in three weeks.

- **Angels GM confirms Ohtani had PRP injection**

Angels two-way player Shohei Ohtani had a platelet-rich plasma injection in his pitching elbow in October, but general manager Billy Eppler said the team is pleased with Ohtani's physical condition.

- **The Shohei Ohtani Experience: Keep track of the Angels phenom's two-way quest**

Los Angeles' pitching/hitting sensation is turning heads with every step. Follow along for the major moments from Ohtani's big league journey.

What *is* known is that the Angels plan to shut Ohtani down from throwing for several weeks to allow his elbow to calm down. On Thursday, Ohtani underwent platelet-rich-plasma (PRP) and stem cell injections to help alleviate pain and inflammation and to facilitate healing. As Angels general manager Billy Eppler indicated, Ohtani will rest for the first 48 to 72 hours and the team then will initiate a progressive physical therapy regimen. In approximately three weeks, he will be re-evaluated to determine the next steps. In other words, there is no definitive timetable for his return, nor is there any definitive indication that Ohtani is headed for surgery.

And thus we are left to wonder the following questions:

How serious is this injury?

Technically speaking, a Grade 2 (moderate) sprain is a partial tearing of the ligament, whereas a Grade 3 sprain represents a complete tear. The amount of damage to the ligament in a Grade 2 sprain or partial tear can vary widely. When it comes to the UCL -- a complex ligament composed of several different bands -- the location of the tear within the tissue and the quality of the tissue also can be factors for consideration. The injury does not have to be a complete tear of the ligament to require surgery; if an athlete continues to experience discomfort and is unable to perform at a competitive level, surgery becomes more likely.

When a blowout UCL injury occurs, it is clearly serious. The pitcher grabs his elbow in obvious pain, typically after making an errant throw, and clinical examination and imaging tests serve to confirm what the thrower already senses -- that surgery is imminent. However, this mechanism of injury is relatively rare.

Far more common are vague complaints that, frankly, do not sound particularly ominous but still have the potential to be serious: stiffness in the elbow (as Ohtani described), tightness in the triceps (Yu Darvish's complaint when he exited a spring start for the Rangers in 2015), or tightness in the forearm (Taijuan Walker of the Arizona Diamondbacks earlier this spring).

Ohtani's injury has caused enough concern within the Angels' organization that the move was made to shut him down immediately.

Joe Robbins/Getty Images

What is the likelihood that Ohtani will need Tommy John surgery?

The UCL does not need to be completely torn for a thrower to require surgery. As I wrote in 2014 about former Mets pitcher Matt Harvey, who was diagnosed with a partial tear of the UCL in his right elbow:

When a pitcher suffers a blowout injury (not actually that common), the decision to go to surgery is fairly easy to make. More often, however, the picture is clouded by inconsistency in terms of both pain and function along with incomplete damage to the ligament itself.

Of course, Harvey ended up undergoing Tommy John surgery to repair his partially torn UCL.

As noted above, the symptoms for Darvish and Walker were not particularly dramatic and both had only partial tears of their respective UCLs. Still, both pitchers underwent Tommy John surgery.

Perhaps the most important factor in determining if an athlete undergoes reconstructive surgery is whether or not he can return to perform at his pre-injury level. Yes, it is the athlete who ultimately makes the decision as to the path he will take after digesting all of the medical information and recommendations. Tommy John surgery is not to be taken lightly given the lengthy recovery process, and generally pitchers choose it as their last resort.

There are pitchers who have successfully returned to competition with only conservative treatment. Masahiro Tanaka of the New York Yankees was diagnosed with a partial UCL tear and underwent PRP injections and rehab, returning to the mound just over two months later. Ohtani's teammate Garrett Richards underwent stem cell injection therapy in 2016 and returned to action in 2017. Richards' 2017 campaign was interrupted due to nerve irritation in his throwing arm, but after returning late in 2017, he started the 2018 season on time. It should be noted that while these injection therapies have shown some promise given the success stories of several pitchers, the jury is still out on their efficacy. Others -- including another Ohtani teammate, Andrew Heaney -- have undergone similar treatment and failed. In 2016, Heaney first underwent stem cell injection therapy but ultimately needed TJ surgery.

Did Ohtani's pre-existing UCL injury suggest he was at a greater risk for a more serious UCL injury?

It did. How could it not? A ligament that exhibits some evidence of wear and tear is more susceptible to further injury than one that does not. But the mere presence of risk doesn't dictate when or how that risk will manifest itself down the line. Ohtani was universally viewed by all the teams scouting him as a player who came with some risk ... but he also presented a unique talent. Organizational decisions on whether or not to sign, draft or trade for players are always made with a risk-versus-reward value proposition in mind. Medical information is one component of the risk calculation and each team must determine just how significant that factor is.

And it's no secret that *all* pitchers, especially those with a history of a high volume of work combined with the ability to throw blistering fastballs, present some level of risk. Ohtani is an unusual case because of what he brings in terms of his skill set at the plate as well as on the mound. But star pitchers who can grow with an organization are sought after more than ever, even if damage to their throwing elbow already has occurred or if there is a hint that it may be imminent.

Why? Undoubtedly, the relative success of pitchers to return to (or, in the case of draftees, exceed) their prior level of function following Tommy John surgery has played a role.

Consider the case of Walker Buehler, a first-round draft pick in 2015 who was signed by the Dodgers even though they knew he might require surgery. After a brief visit to the majors last year, Buehler is back pitching for the big league club in 2018. With a fastball hovering near 96 mph and an array of impressive pitching stats (2.74 ERA, 1.02 WHIP, 4.6 K/BB ratio), Buehler looks to be delivering early returns on the team's investment.

Sean M. Haffey/Getty Images

Could Ohtani potentially still serve as a hitter even if his elbow won't allow him to pitch?

This is where things get interesting. Ohtani is a right-handed pitcher who bats left. His injured elbow is his lead elbow when hitting. Why does this matter? Because the stress on this elbow is minimal when he is swinging the bat.

It would seem that even if Ohtani's arm does not allow him to throw again this season, he could potentially remain involved as a hitter. Of course, should he ultimately require surgery, remaining on the active roster as a hitter would delay the operation. With the average recovery

time following Tommy John surgery hovering around 14 months for pitchers, a postseason surgery for Ohtani would translate to a potential resumption of pitching in 2020.

But consider this: Should it be determined at the end of a trial of conservative treatment that Ohtani requires surgery, the soonest he likely would be ready to return would be the start of the 2020 season. Hmm.

For the time being, the Angels are focusing on Ohtani's treatment plan with the hope that he will be able to resume a throwing progression and return to action. How the organization decides to proceed if Ohtani struggles when he tries to throw is something that can wait.

"I'm just going to take every day as it comes and put him on this course of recovery and strengthening for the next three weeks and then deal with what we've got to deal with in three weeks' time," Eppler said.

The one-day-at-a-time plan is the only thing right now that is certain when it comes to Ohtani's fate.

The Athletic

Andrew Suárez holds the line as Giants get rare win against Stephen Strasburg Julian McWilliams

WASHINGTON — Johnny Cueto sat atop the bench in the visitors' dugout Friday ahead of the Giants' series opener against the Washington Nationals. Cueto's long dreads with brown tips spilled from underneath his hat. His Cuban link chain peaked out from the back of his mesh Giants shirt.

It was May 7 when Dr. James Andrews told Cueto he wouldn't recommend Tommy John surgery for the right-hander. It came as a shocker to Cueto, who certainly thought he was going to receive the opposite diagnosis.

Instead he would be out six to eight weeks. Friday — just a month and a day after meeting with Andrews — he threw his first bullpen at Nationals Park.

"First off I want to thank God that I don't have to (get) surgery," Cueto said through interpreter Erwin Higueros. "It's a roller coaster. In my mind, God is big and he opted to help me not get the Tommy John and just rehab for a month."

Cueto threw 35 pitches and will throw two more bullpens, then a live batting practice before the Giants send him out on assignment. However, manager Bruce Bochy said during his pregame availability that Cueto is still a ways away. Jeff Samardzija, out with right shoulder tightness, is closer to a return.

But even with the injuries suffered, namely to Madison Bumgarner and Joe Panik, the Giants felt that if they could remain at .500 in the absence of Bumgarner they would have a chance. The Giants entered Friday's game at 31-31. They left one game above .500 with a 9-5 win over the Nationals. They're winners of their last seven of eight games.

Maybe this is them turning the corner. Perhaps they've taken their mightiest blow and now have put themselves in a prime position to make a run in the underwhelming National League West.

In the starters' absence, young arms were suddenly tasked to keep the entire rotation turning. Some were plucked earlier than anticipated as cogs to tame the chaos.

Andrew Suárez is one of them. The rookie worked 4 1/3 innings and gave up four runs Friday, but the line can be somewhat deceiving. He pitched three scoreless innings against the Nationals lineup before he lost some command and was finally pulled.

"I love it," Suárez said after the game. "Just competing here, playing the best baseball. Just learning from the (older) guys here. Every start after I finish they tell me (what I'm doing wrong)."

Saturday it will be Dereck Rodríguez's turn, who debuted May 29 and got his first win in his first start June 3.

"It's been a good run," Bochy said. "We've got our hands full these next couple (games). Sure, it's good to be at this point, but you keep going and you keep marching and guys are doing a nice job at that. They've put the losses behind them. But also put the wins behind them."

The Giants have had their trouble at Nationals Park, where they were just 5-17 in the regular season dating back to 2011. With Stephen Strasburg pitching against them on Friday, that record looked destined to mark 18 losses. But the team made easy work of Strasburg, who was hit hard during his two innings, giving up three runs (though it's worth mentioning he left the game with shoulder tightness and will get an MRI).

"It's the way that it goes sometimes," Andrew McCutchen said. "The game is so unpredictable. I know my numbers against Strasburg aren't great, but I was able to hit a homer off him today (in the first inning). On any given day it could be your day."

There's a flip side to all this, too. Though the Giants are on a run now, there are still 99 games left. There's no guarantee Samardzija returns to form once he completes his assignment. And specifically with Cueto, is the conclusion reached to rehab his arm instead of Tommy John a delay of the inevitable? If not, will he be effective?

The Giants will need the Cueto of old to make that push. They'll need the Samardzija who can eat up innings, too. It's a huge task for the younger crop of pitchers to carry that type of load alone.

The Giants haven't been at their full potential. They've had to do just enough to maintain mediocrity in hopes that health will again swing in their favor.

“Sometimes you’re up. Sometimes you’re down. You never know,” Cueto said as the media dispersed and awaited Bochy.

Certainly, it’s felt like that. After 63 games, there have been the downs, now the ups and you still don’t know what that all means.