



SF Giants Press Clips Monday, August 6, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants get key win against Diamondbacks on Evan Longoria homer Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — Five games out or seven out. Happy flight home or dejection. A winning trip — finally — or a .500 trip. Losing three of four to the first-place team in the West or gaining a tough split on the road. Staying marginally relevant in the playoff picture or falling off the map.

Swing games could not get any swingier than Sunday's at Chase Field, and thanks to one huge swing by Evan Longoria, a tie-breaking home run in the eighth inning on a 97 mph Archie Bradley fastball, the Giants earned the 3-2 win.

"That was huge," starter Derek Holland said after he thrived yet again with 51/3 solid innings.

Holland was on a bike doing cardio when strength and conditioning coordinator Carl Kochan called Longoria's shot.

"To his credit, he said this would be the perfect matchup and he felt like this was the battle that Longoria was going to win," Holland said.

Longoria is winning a lot more of them now than he did before he broke his hand. Since his July 26 return, he is 15-for-42 (.357) with three doubles, a triple and two home runs.

He had a hand in all three Giants runs, singling home the first one in the third inning, then doubling and scoring the second run in the sixth, off Robbie Ray, on Nick Hundley's single.

Manager Bruce Bochy has returned Longoria to the third spot in the lineup, mostly where he hit with Tampa Bay, behind Andrew McCutchen and Buster Posey. Posey singled and walked in four trips after a game off to ensure he did not get a concussion from a foul tip Friday night.

McCutchen ran his streak of reaching base safely to eight plate appearances before Bradley struck him out in the seventh.

Bochy plans to stick with McCutchen, Posey, Longoria and Brandon Crawford at one through four for now, even against right-handed pitchers, offering the promise of lineup stability that Bochy has not been able create with so many players getting hurt.

“We’re coming off a pretty good trip and I like the way it’s working right now,” Bochy said.

The Giants went 4-2 in San Diego and Phoenix for their first winning trip in more than 13 months. The 1½ games they gained in the West since they left home were critical.

Their odds at the playoffs remain long, but Sunday’s win might have changed some minds in the front office about how to proceed in August.

McCutchen is getting hot right as waiver-trade season gets into full swing. Maybe Brian Sabean and Bobby Evans lean more toward keeping him for now to see if the Giants can make that elusive charge with McCutchen, Posey and Longoria all hitting.

Longoria said he found something in his swing through recent work. In the eighth inning, he found a fastball down the middle from Bradley and crushed it to center. There are no sure things to that part of this ballpark. The ball barely cleared an overhang and found the seats.

Longoria has not been as clutch as he would have liked in his first months with the Giants. It weighed on him enough to tell first-base coach Jose Alguacil that he needed to get a hit in one of those situations.

Then he did, fighting off an inside fastball to roll his scoring single through the right side in the third inning following a McCutchen single and Posey walk. That was just a prelude to his 402-foot winner.

“You can constantly beat yourself up failing in those situations,” Longoria said. “Just a little of being able to feel that can help get you over the top.”

Will Smith saved it with a 1-2-3 ninth inning after Sam Dyson made a huge pitch, getting Ketel Marte to fly out with the bases loaded to end the eighth.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants: Opportunity almost knocks for catcher Ronnie Freeman

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — You are Ronnie Freeman. You caught for three years in college, got drafted fairly high, then strapped on the gear for seven years in places like Yakima, Wash.; Visalia; Mobile,

Ala.; Reno; Richmond, Va., and Sacramento.

You finally get “the call” and rush to the airport in Nashville for a flight to Phoenix, and dress in a major-league clubhouse for the first time. However, you not only don’t get to play, you can’t even sit in the dugout for the game, instead watching it on TV.

Talk about “so close, yet so far.” You might bite through a piece of wood in frustration, but not Freeman, who said he loved the experience, even if it was fleeting.

“It’s exciting to be up here and at least get to meet everyone and get my feet wet,” Freeman said. “It’s a great opportunity.”

The Giants acquired the 27-year-old from the Diamondbacks for catching depth during spring training, for cash. When Buster Posey was forced out of Friday night’s game with concussion symptoms, the Giants brought Freeman to Phoenix for the taxi squad in case they needed to activate him Sunday.

Posey was fine and played the entire game at first base. Manager Bruce Bochy said Posey probably will catch Dereck Rodriguez against the Astros at AT&T Park on Monday night.

So Freeman got a ticket back to Sacramento after two days with the Giants at Chase Field, where he played once in an instructional league game. He and his teammates arrived and left in their uniforms, not even showering in a big-league clubhouse.

Freeman hopes for a September call-up, which he said would be “ideal,” but his consolation prize now was getting to chat with Posey, a fellow Georgian, which he called an “amazing” experience.

Sacramento pitchers like throwing to Freeman. Pierce Johnson, who rejoined the big club Saturday, said he was “super stoked” to hear that Freeman was coming up.

“He’s got a pretty good feel for calling games and he’s really accurate with his throws,” Johnson said. “He’ll have a little bit of a learning curve at this level, but he’ll get it. He’s a smart guy.”

Briefly: Bochy became a grandfather for the second time this year Saturday. Son Brett (the pitcher) and his wife, Kelsey, had a girl, Blakely Grace. ... Madison Bumgarner and the Dodgers’ Clayton Kershaw are lined up for their 11th meeting Aug. 13 in Los Angeles. The teams are 5-5 in those games, but the Dodgers have won the past four.

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants’ Posey playing first base, might catch again Monday night
Henry Schulman

PHOENIX - Buster Posey returns to the lineup as first baseman Sunday. If he gets through the

game with no additional light-headedness from that foul tip to the mask Friday he will catch Dereck Rodriguez in Monday night's series opener against the Astros at AT&T Park.

Manager Bruce Bochy promised the club is not pushing Posey, who has had at least official concussion, and probably some unofficial ones.

"If there was anything going on he wouldn't be playing," Bochy said.

Bochy is sending a lineup full of right-handed hitters, one through nine, to face lefty Robbie Ray in a bid to split the four-game series and secure the Giants' first winning trip in more than a year.

That means Steven Duggar, Brandon Crawford and Joe Panik all are taking a seat.

Derek Holland takes the mound hoping to continue a nice run. He has a 2.68 ERA in his past eight starts.

Claim jumpers: There was an interesting development in the league Sunday morning. The Padres let pitchers Tyson Ross and Jordan Lyles go on waiver claims to the Cardinals and Brewers, respectively, which allows them to shed salary and open spots for young pitchers to look at before season's end.

The Giants had claiming priority over both National League Central teams by virtue of their inferior record. In years past you might have seen them stake a claim on a guy like Ross, a 31-year-old Berkeley native and Cal product who could provide innings at a time when the Giants cannot definitively identify their fifth starter.

It's not clear whether the Giants passed because they did not like the player, but that pesky luxury-tax threshold probably came into play.

Ross is due just \$550,000 the rest of the season, but even that number could push the Giants close enough to the \$197 million cap to impact their ability to add players from the minors later in the season. Every dollar counts.

They still hope to see Jeff Samardzija pitch again, perhaps by mid-August, and are not giving up on Chris Stratton. Before Stratton's demotion Saturday, he worked with pitching coach Curt Young on the finish to his delivery, hoping an adjustment will allow him to get the movement he wants on his fastball, and not movement over the plate, which is what happened in Friday night's loss.

Stratton will test it in a game at Triple-A in a few days.

So where does that leave the Giants for Thursday, when the fifth spot in the rotation arrives?

They are leaning toward a bullpen game, likely started by Ty Blach, assuming they do not blow through their bullpen here Sunday and in the two games against the Astros on Monday and Tuesday. The Giants are off Wednesday, so if they ever wanted to have Johnny Wholestaff pitch, Thursday would be the time.

Quick hits:

- Bruce Bochy became a grandfather for the second time this year Saturday night. Blakely Grace Bochy is the first child for son Brett, the former Giants pitcher, and his wife Kelsey.
- The Giants play their final Chase Field game for 2018. On Aug. 15 they will play their last game at Dodger Stadium. The odd schedule has the Giants facing their division rivals just once more each the rest of the way, both series at home. That's not good news for a team hoping to rise in the standings, because the easiest path is beating the teams ahead of you.
- Assuming the Giants do not skip the fifth spot in the rotation Thursday, the Aug. 13 series opener in Los Angeles will be pit Madison Bumgarner and Clayton Kershaw.
- Duggar got his first home-run ball back in a modest trade. The fan who caught it got a signed ball, a meeting with Duggar and tickets for Sunday's game. It was the fan's birthday, too.

MLB.com

Lineup tweak pays off in Giants' winning trip

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- Injuries have forced the Giants into multiple moving parts in the batting order this season, but they came out of their first winning road trip in 13 months with a new look they feel good about.

Andrew McCutchen, Buster Posey, Evan Longoria and Brandon Crawford have hit in the first four spots barring days off and nicks for the last week, and manager Bruce Bochy plans to keep it that way.

If it works, don't fix it.

Longoria, in his sixth straight start in the three-hole, had three hits and two RBIs, and his tiebreaking homer just to the left of the batter's eye in center field in the eighth inning gave the Giants a 3-2 victory over the D-backs on Sunday. He had hit third four times previously this season.

New leadoff man McCutchen reached base safely in eight straight plate appearances beginning with a five-hit game Saturday, and he singled and scored on Longoria's single off Robbie Ray in the third inning. Longoria hit leadoff for the first time this season July 28.

Posey contributed a single and a walk Sunday, his first game back since taking a foul tip off the

mask Friday.

"That's what it is going to take, those guys, veterans," Bochy said.

Those four hit one through four for the first time Monday, when the Giants began a two-game sweep in San Diego before splitting a four-game weekend series in Arizona. They had not had a winning road trip since taking four of six in Pittsburgh and Detroit from June 30-July 6, 2017, a span of 13 trips.

"It's been tough. We've had guys in and out of the lineup," Longoria said. "We as individuals expect to perform at a certain level. It is nice to be all out there together and finally get it going.

"If there is any time to get it going, it is now. We need everybody to start clicking and score some runs. The pitchers have been doing a great job. We just need to support that."

Longoria's fingerprints were all over this one -- he beat an exaggerated shift by muscling an inside fastball into right-center field for an RBI single to tie the game at 1 in the third inning, and he doubled and scored on Nick Hundley's single to tie it again in the sixth.

Then came his 12th homer, on a 97 mph fastball from Archie Bradley with one out in the eighth.

"That's the beauty or the terrible part about this game is that it can be one pitch and I just made a bad one," Bradley said. "To guys like him, [if] you make a mistake, sometimes they miss it but usually they don't. That was one he didn't miss."

Longoria was 8-for-18 with two homers in the four-game series at Arizona while extending his hitting streak to eight games, and he is hitting .357 with three doubles, two homers and four RBIs in 10 games since returning from a broken left hand that caused him to miss 34 games.

"It took four or five days, but I feel like I've found a little something," Longoria said. "This place [Chase Field] I think helps. It is a pretty good hitters' ballpark. You see the ball well.

"It has a tendency to get you back on track and swinging the bat the way you feel you are capable of doing."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Sam Dyson hit Steven Souza Jr., the first batter he faced, to load the bases with two outs in the eighth inning, but got Ketel Marte on a routine fly to left field to preserve a 3-2 lead, and Will Smith struck out two of the three he faced in a 1-2-3 ninth for his sixth save.

"The pitching was there, and we needed it," Bochy said.

SOUND SMART

Right-hander Ray Black threw three fastballs at 99 mph and five at 98 among his 12 pitches

while extending his hitless streak to 10 1/3 innings with a 1-2-3 seventh inning. When Longoria homered in the eighth, Black got his first Major League victory.

"It's incredible. It's as advertised," Black said about the feeling of the first win. "It's just being able to be a part of these situations where you're in line for the win."

Black has given up only three baserunners -- all on walks -- and has 13 strikeouts in his last 10 appearances.

HE SAID IT

"Going into it, we knew we had to do whatever we could to get as much ground gained on this team. This is one of those races now. It's tight. We have to get things going. This is going to be a tight race. It is a great division all the way around." -- left-hander Derek Holland, who gave up three hits and two runs with six strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings

UP NEXT

For the first time since 2015, the Giants will meet the juggernaut that Houston has become in a two-game miniseries that begins Monday at AT&T Park. Dereck Rodriguez and Madison Bumgarner are the Giants' scheduled starters. The teams split four games in 2015, and Bumgarner struck out 12 in a complete-game victory Aug. 11.

MLB.com

Pudge: Son's quick success a 'giant surprise'

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- Dereck Rodriguez will look to extend his strong recent run when he starts for the Giants against the World Series champion Astros on Monday, and at least one Hall of Fame catcher has been impressed ... and maybe even a little taken aback, at least early.

"He's a giant surprise, to be honest with you, the way he has been pitching and the way he takes every start, the way he looks every start," Rodriguez's father, Ivan, said this week.

"Every time he pitches, more and more, he looks better. He's feeling better and doing great."

Dereck Rodriguez, who will oppose right-hander Charlie Morton on Monday, has made six straight quality starts and also had a scoreless three-inning relief appearance. He is 3-0 with a 1.49 ERA in that stretch, with 32 strikeouts and 12 walks in 42 1/3 innings. Opponents have hit .177 against him.

Rodriguez has walked as many as three batters only twice in 12 appearances, and his strike percentage is 64 percent.

It is the kind of control and command a catcher holds dear.

"He has a good idea of how to get people out," said Ivan Rodriguez, who has seen his son pitch four times in person and talks to him frequently.

"Throw strikes, that's it. Strike one. He throws a lot of strikes. If you see the amount of pitches he throws per start, he's about 100-111. And out of those, over 60 strikes. When you throw strikes, you are going to get a lot of guys out."

Dereck Rodriguez was promoted in late May after the Giants' rotation suffered injuries. He takes his father's words to heart.

"He's a catcher, so he knows what I need to do to succeed up here," Rodriguez said. "Throwing strikes, getting ahead of hitters, quick outs. You are ahead in the count, it puts the hitter in a pretty bad spot."

Like parents everywhere, Ivan Rodriguez admitted watching his child perform is a lot more difficult than actually being part of the competition.

"In the beginning, the first couple, yeah, I was nervous," he said, "but the other day I went to see him, I was more relaxed. He was doing great."

"The thing that I saw was, all the starts he had were with [Buster] Posey behind the plate. This was one with [Nick Hundley], and he still did a great job. So his mindset is pretty good."

Buster's back

After missing Saturday's game while being observed for concussion symptoms, Posey was back in the lineup at first base Sunday. He was forced to leave Friday's game after taking a foul tip off his mask.

Posey could get back behind the plate Monday, manager Bruce Bochy said Sunday, adding, "We'll see how he gets through the game today."

"He feels no effects from that. He's fine, and that's why he's playing. If there were anything going on, anything, he wouldn't play today. My guess is he should be fine to catch tomorrow."

Worth noting

The Giants, who are off Wednesday, are considering using Thursday as a "bullpen day," Bochy indicated Sunday, depending on how the bullpen is used against Houston in the next two days behind Rodriguez and Tuesday starter Madison Bumgarner.

Andrew Suarez could take the turn on regular rest after starting in Arizona on Saturday, but the Giants have been inclined to give their starters an extra day of rest when the schedule permits. Jeff Samardzija is closer to returning, but no schedule has been set.

- Bochy became a grandfather for the second time when son Brett's wife, Lesley, gave birth to

Blakely Grace on Saturday. It is Bochy's first granddaughter.

NBC Sports Bay Area

After monster July, Giants top prospect Joey Bart named Northwest League Player of the Month

Alex Pavlovic

Joey Bart's first month in pro baseball couldn't have gone much better.

On June 4, Bart was taken with the No. 2 overall pick by the Giants. Two weeks later, he got a signing bonus of \$7.025 million, the largest upfront bonus ever for a position player. On Monday, Bart was named Northwest League Player of the Month for July.

In 21 games with the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes during July, Bart lived up to the hype as he hit .333/.379/.747 with nine doubles, nine home runs and 24 RBI.

Baseball America and MLB Pipeline have already elevated Bart to the No. 1 prospect in the Giants' organization.

So far in August, the Georgia Tech product is hitting .412/.474/.765 with two doubles and three RBI.

The Athletic

Down on the farm: Giants promote three of their top pitching prospects

Melissa Lockard

Three promising Giants pitching prospects were on the move this week. The Giants promoted right-hander Logan Webb from High-A San Jose to Double-A Richmond, left-hander John Gavin from Low-A Augusta to San Jose, and left-hander Seth Corry from the AZL Giants Orange to short-season Salem-Keizer.

Webb made his Double-A debut on Sunday. He allowed three runs in five innings, striking out four and walking three. Webb posted a 1.82 ERA in 74 innings with San Jose. He struck out 74 and walked 36, while holding opposing batters to a .207 average. The 21-year-old is in his first full season back after having Tommy John surgery partway through the 2016 season.

Gavin, a native of San Jose, takes Webb's spot in the Giants rotation. He made his California League debut on Saturday, allowing four runs on four hits and two walks in 5 2/3 innings. He struck out seven. Gavin thoroughly dominated the South Atlantic League this season, posting a 2.08 ERA and striking out 111 in 95 innings for the GreenJackets. He was the Giants' eighth-round pick in 2017 out of Cal State Fullerton.

Corry, the Giants' third-round pick last season out of Lone Peak HS in Utah, earned his promotion out of the Arizona Rookie League after posting a 2.61 ERA in 38 innings for the AZL

Giants Orange. Corry struck out 42 and walked 17. The 19-year-old struggled with his command in his pro debut season but has made significant strides in that area this year. He will make his debut with the Volcanoes this week.

Four Volcanoes named to Northwest League All-Star team

Salem-Keizer will be well represented at the Northwest League-Pioneer League All-Star game on Tuesday. Joey Bart, Gregory Santos, Jesus Tona and Diego Rincones were all named to the Northwest League All-Star roster this week.

Bart, the Giants' top pick this year, has been arguably the league's most dangerous hitter since he joined the Volcanoes' roster on July 3. In 25 games, he's homered nine times and has a .346/.395/.750 line. It wouldn't be surprising to see Bart move up to full-season ball once the All-Star game passes.

Rincones, a 19-year-old outfielder, will join Bart in the Northwest League's starting lineup. Rincones was an Arizona Rookie League postseason All-Star last year when he hit .308 in 47 games. This year for Salem-Keizer, Rincones is batting .357/.380/.497 with four home runs in 38 games. He has only 18 strikeouts in 152 at-bats.

Santos, who was acquired from the Red Sox in the Eduardo Núñez deal last July, makes his first All-Star team. The 18-year-old right-hander has a 3.64 ERA and a 38:13 K:BB in 42 innings for the Volcanoes this year. He's allowed just one home run.

Tona, the Volcanoes closer, currently holds a 0.42 ERA in 21 1/3 innings. The 22-year-old right-hander has converted all eight of his save opportunities and has a 31:6 K:BB.

Extra Innings

— After being released by the Diamondbacks on Wednesday, veteran outfielder Cesar Puello quickly found a new home in the Giants' organization, signing as a free agent. Puello joined the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats on Friday. He is 1 for 8 in his first three games for Sacramento. Puello hit .317 with a .426 OBP for Triple-A Reno before his release. Puello is a career .290 hitter in 819 minor league games. He has 17 games of big league experience.

— Roberto Gómez was released off the Giants' 40-man roster earlier this year, but he was re-signed to a minor league deal and he returned to the Sacramento bullpen this week, throwing a scoreless inning on Thursday. Gómez made five appearances for the Giants earlier this year. He missed two months with an injury and was released on July 5 before being re-signed on July 9 to a minor league deal.

— After walking the only batter he faced on Monday, right-hander Tyler Beede landed on the River Cats' disabled list two days later. The former first-round pick has a 6.23 ERA in 21 2/3 innings since moving to the bullpen.

— Right-hander Shaun Anderson had a solid outing for the River Cats on Wednesday, allowing

two runs on five hits in seven innings in a win over Memphis. Anderson has had two good starts and one bad start since joining the River Cats' rotation in mid-July.

— Third baseman Jonah Arenado had three multi-hit games this week for Richmond, including a 4-for-4 night on Tuesday. He drove in six runs for the week and is batting .308 over his last 10 games.

— The Giants released veteran right-hander Jose Flores off of the Richmond roster this week. Flores had a 7.22 ERA in 57 1/3 innings for Richmond and Sacramento this season. The Giants also released catcher Connor Sabanosh off of the San Jose roster. Sabanosh was an undrafted free agent signing out of Ohio State in 2016. In three seasons in the Giants system, he appeared in only 39 games.

— Outfielder Heliot Ramos is working his way through a bit of a hitting funk with Augusta. After batting .272 with a .336 OBP in June, Ramos hit only .219 with a .299 OBP in July. He's 3 for 15 to start August. Ramos has particularly struggled against left-handed pitchers this year, hitting only .196 in 112 at-bats. Given that he's a right-handed hitter, that split is likely to change as he matures and gains more experience versus southpaws.

— Since returning from a rehab assignment in the Arizona Rookie League, GreenJackets outfielder Malique Ziegler is batting .256 with a .318 OBP in 10 games.

— Giants second-round pick Sean Hjelle worked another scoreless two-inning outing for Salem-Keizer on Thursday. Hjelle has made seven short starts for the Volcanoes and has allowed runs in only two of them. He has 11 strikeouts and one walk in 11 2/3 innings to start his pro career.

— It was a solid week for AZL Giants Black outfielder Alexander Canario. The 18-year-old went 6 for 22 with a home run and seven RBIs. Canario has an .842 OPS in 29 games in the AZL this season.

— Right-hander Sam Coonrod made his first rehab appearance since undergoing Tommy John surgery late in the 2017 season. He was roughed up in a relief appearance with the AZL Giants Black, allowing three runs in two-thirds of an inning. He walked one and allowed two hits.

The Athletic

Thirtysomething Tommy John surgery: What advice do John Smoltz, Tim Hudson and Bronson Arroyo have for Johnny Cueto?

Andrew Baggarly

Johnny Cueto used his camera phone to pan the white-paneled cabin of the private jet he chartered back to the Bay Area on Friday. There was Giants trainer Anthony Reyes, stifling a grin. There was the back of the pilot's head. There was Reyes again, shades down this time. There was Cueto and his moneymaking right arm. There was the sling and the gauze and the beige throw pillow tucked underneath it.

“Todo salió bien gracias a Dios,” Cueto captioned his Instagram video.

All went well, thank God.

Cueto became the 65th major league or minor league pitcher to undergo Tommy John surgery in 2018, according to a database compiled by Hardball Times contributor Jon Roegele. Only one of them, Angels reliever Blake Wood, is older than Cueto, who will turn 33 in February.

The database lists more than 500 professional pitchers who have undergone the reconstructive elbow ligament procedure within the past five years. Just 18 of them were performed on major league pitchers in their 30s (plus one, Joe Nathan, in his 40s).

Strength and beauty are the blessings of youth. Recovery and rehab tend to favor the young, too.

Cueto is about to embark upon a regimented and well-established 12-month rehab protocol that is as dull as it is demanding, and his arm is bound to be crankier on some days than others. Soreness will linger. Cueto will have more moments than he can count when he wishes he could bounce back or power through as his 22-year-old self once could.

But experience has its own blessings.

The Athletic contacted three accomplished pitchers who underwent the procedure in their mid-30s — John Smoltz, Tim Hudson and Bronson Arroyo — and each of them spoke in detail about the uncertainty they felt while arriving at a career crossroads, the chutes and ladders they experienced within their rehab process, the expectations Cueto should have as he gets started, and how the scary phrase “return to function” is likely to apply to him.

Asked about the Giants’ spirited and artistic right-hander, they arrived at independent yet identical conclusions:

If firsthand experience is any guide, Johnny Cueto will be just fine.

The decision

All physical discomfort aside, the decision for a veteran pitcher to undergo Tommy John surgery can be the most agonizing part.

Smoltz was a few months short of his 34th birthday in the spring of 2000, his elbow was wrecked, and he wasn’t merely contemplating retirement. He was resolved.

“I was ready to call it a career,” Smoltz said. “There weren’t many 34-year-olds, in my mind, having Tommy John surgery. I was going to be in the final year of my contract and I just figured that no one would want a 34-year-old who had Tommy John surgery. I just didn’t think it was

going to be worth it. I was pretty down and out and ready to call it quits.”

Then he received a phone call.

From Tommy John.

The pitcher who served as the original guinea pig for Dr. Frank Jobe’s pioneering operation reminded Smoltz of one easily overlooked fact: Tommy John also was 34 when he had his procedure — and he squeezed 11 more seasons out of his arm.

Buoyed by that phone call, Smoltz went through with the procedure and pitched eight more full seasons — four as a starter, four as a dominant closer — while making four National League All-Star teams. Those padded accomplishments led to this: Smoltz is the only pitcher in the Hall of Fame who has undergone Tommy John surgery.

Knowing what he knows now, he might have had the procedure even earlier.

“Hindsight’s 20/20, but I’d have probably pitched (more seasons) with less pain,” Smoltz said. “You know, we were going through the playoffs every year with the Braves. So I didn’t really feel I had any options. I pitched as long as I could till it completely tore.”

John Smoltz finished building a Hall of Fame résumé after his Tommy John surgery.

That’s exactly what Hudson and Arroyo did.

Hudson had bouts of elbow soreness for years and remembered feeling something awry in his arm shortly after the All-Star break with the Braves in 2008. Then came the splitter that struck out Dan Uggla in Miami, and it was as if his elbow yelped in protest.

“It felt like I strained my forearm muscle,” Hudson said. “I didn’t feel like a pop, just a little bit of a strain, and I actually pitched into the sixth inning. But by then my velocity was down to 81-82 mph. The (ulnar collateral) ligament was gone. They said my forearm muscles were so strong around my elbow that it allowed me to pitch throughout that game.”

The MRI showed the rest, and Hudson’s surgery date — 8/8/2008 — is easier to remember than his ATM code. Wednesday will mark its 10th anniversary.

Arroyo pushed it further than one start or one week. He figures he pushed it further than anyone.

“My ligament broke,” he said, “and I made eight more starts.”

He was 37 years old in 2014, pitching for the Arizona Diamondbacks, getting guys out with a 79 mph fastball, fully aware that something was very wrong — and yet those outs were all that

mattered to him. Even in his final three starts, with no ligament, he went 3-0 with a 2.95 ERA.

“I didn’t miss a start in 19-and-a-half years, so I was going to push it till it broke,” said Arroyo, whose perfect-attendance streak stood at 369 consecutive assignments before the Diamondbacks took the ball away from him.

Arroyo didn’t resurface for three seasons, and made just 14 more starts in his career, but he is quick to point out that his situation was different. He combined his Tommy John surgery with a shoulder procedure, which involves much more uncertainty. And he was five years older than Cueto is now.

“I felt I could’ve thrown 500 (starts) in a row,” Arroyo said. “And no doubt, Johnny is one of those pitchers who probably thought he could pull that off, too.”

Bronson Arroyo was a mentor to Johnny Cueto in Cincinnati and now can probably lend some advice during the Tommy John rehab process.

Arroyo was a mentor for Cueto when they pitched together from 2008 to 2013 with the Cincinnati Reds. Cueto gained a measure of his appreciation for creativity and durability from Arroyo, who was his elder statesman in the rotation.

And Arroyo still knows his former Reds teammate through and through: Yes, Cueto did believe in his own invincibility, or at least in his own resourcefulness to overcome any physical obstacle.

Those close to him say Cueto has a serious goal of pitching in the major leagues into his 40s. Over the past few months, he held onto authentic hopes that he could battle through the damaged elbow ligament and keep taking his turn.

But in the end, for Cueto, there was no other decision to make.

He was originally diagnosed with a partial tear of his ulnar collateral ligament in early May, after he finally spoke up about the chronic elbow pain he endured despite five exceptional starts (0.84 ERA, .150 opponents average) in April. Two doctors recommended surgery, but no less an authority than Dr. James Andrews — the physician who operated on Smoltz and Hudson — recommended that Cueto first give rest and rehab a try. Andrews administered a contrast dye MRI that indicated part of the ligament remained intact. That was all Cueto needed to hear. He wanted to keep pitching.

How badly did Cueto want to pitch? His appointment with Andrews was on a Monday in Pensacola, Florida. He told Giants manager Bruce Bochy to give him the ball two days earlier, on the Saturday in Atlanta. The coaches thought he was joking. Cueto was serious. He saw no reason why he couldn’t take the mound and compete with whatever he had. His arm would come with him to Pensacola, regardless.

The Giants politely declined, and put Cueto on the 60-day disabled list in part to make certain he would not try to rush the rest, recovery and rebuilding process.

It didn't work. Cueto returned last month and made three high-traffic but competitive starts. Then in his fourth outing on July 28 against the Brewers, it was obvious something was wrong. He stiffened up between innings and more or less played catch while recording 12 outs. Bochy found Cueto in the dugout in the bottom of the fourth. He was less a manager and more a referee stopping a fight.

"I feel really bad. I surely want to try to help the team," Cueto said through Spanish interpreter Erwin Higueros. "I want to go out there like a warrior and give my best. But I keep telling you guys and keep telling myself that I'm fine and in reality I'm not. And I just feel sad that I can't help. It's very difficult every time I go out there."

When Dr. Neal ElAttrache opened up Cueto's arm on Thursday in Los Angeles, he discovered that the UCL tear was complete. There was nothing in there but an extensive amount of scar tissue. Yet somehow, Cueto approached 90 mph in his final start, hitting it once.

"I don't know how you were doing it," Dr. ElAttrache told him, "other than the fact that you're you."

The process

When Cueto arrived in Scottsdale this past spring, reporters asked him how he spent his offseason.

"Same thing I do," Cueto said. "Just ride the horses and feed the chickens."

Cueto loves spending time at Doña Cristina, his ranch in the Dominican Republic. His offseason strategy has been as old school as they come: kick back and use spring training to get into pitching shape. His teams tolerated it because Cueto always answered the bell in the regular season and would end the year among the league leaders in innings pitched. He knew himself, and gave nobody a reason to doubt him.

This will be a much different winter for Cueto, who is sure to take a few breaks to feed the chickens at Doña Cristina but will spend much of his time doing rehab work at the Giants' complex in Arizona.

He is said to be highly motivated because he wants to return in September of next season, rather than take a more conservative path toward 2020.

Hudson set and achieved the same goal for a 13-month return for the following September. But his motivations were different.

"I had one option year on my contract, so I had to prove to the Braves that I was healthy and

deserving of an extension,” Hudson said. “It was either that, or I’d be pitching to get a contract somewhere else.”

Hudson wasn’t anxious about whether he would return to function, but how fast he could get there. And as he rehabbed alongside pitchers in their 20s, there were times he felt he couldn’t keep up.

“When you’re younger, things just heal quicker,” Hudson said. “You always heard how good people felt after eight, nine, 10 months, and that wasn’t me. I wasn’t that guy. I’m at 10, 11, 12 months saying, ‘Golly this thing is still stiff, it’s still sore.’ That was a bit worrisome for me, because guys were feeling ready at 10 months and I wasn’t.”

Yet Hudson hit his target on the dot when he returned on Sept. 1 and made six more starts in 2009, showing enough health and stuff for the Braves to tear up his option and replace it with a three-year, \$28 million extension.

“My velo was as good as it had ever been, but I was still sore,” Hudson said. “It was still a bit tender at 13 months. The one advantage for me is I didn’t have to pitch through it for long. I continued doing rehab that next offseason. And when I came back in spring training, at 16 or 17 months out, that’s where I noticed, ‘Hey, this is what they talked about.’ It felt amazing. It felt like I was 23 again. It wasn’t stiff or sore. I could long toss whenever I wanted. An hour after a ‘pen or when I pitched, I felt totally fine.”

Cueto is not pitching for a contract. He is guaranteed \$21 million in each of the next three seasons, with a \$22 million club option for 2022 that includes a \$5 million buyout.

Hudson’s advice to Cueto? Make a start or two next season if he feels good and values some peace of mind. But otherwise, be patient and don’t rush it.

“Go by the book, man,” Hudson said. “Whatever that rehab process is, if he feels strong and wants to do more, don’t do it. All steps they have to take to get back, it’s down to a science. The guys who try to rush through it, those are the guys it seems who have setbacks.”

Tim Hudson gained peace of mind — and a contract extension — when he returned for seven late-season starts in 2009 after his Tommy John surgery.

Even 17 years ago, when Smoltz had his procedure, the rehab protocol was tested and trusted.

“It was as good as you can imagine,” Smoltz said. “I guess I was fortunate in one way because it was my fifth surgery. So I was used to it. I was used to rehabbing. Missing a whole year of baseball was the hardest part. But rehabbing, getting through those issues, I had a lot of experience with that. So that wasn’t a big deal.

“But what I couldn’t believe is how good it felt to come back. I felt I could throw a lot earlier

than the protocol, and I ended up being wrong. I'd never felt so good because I'd been pitching with it for so long that I was excited to throw the ball pain-free."

Smoltz's eventual issue was tendinitis, which began in the later stage of his rehab and forced him into a career change to the bullpen — a role he dominated until his arm allowed him to return to the rotation.

"Quite frankly, I thought I re-tore my ligament, to be honest with you, only to find it was just tendinitis," Smoltz said. "I ended up pitching seven more years, changed jobs twice and really never had a problem to this day with my ligament."

Neither did Hudson. In fact, he spoke by phone from Louisville, Kentucky, where he was pitching for a team of former big leaguers in the Bluegrass World Series against teams made up of college kids from wooden-bat leagues.

"Tell you what, it's just good to get out there and put a uniform on again and hang out with the guys," said Hudson, who played alongside Chipper Jones for manager Johnny Bench. "It's been fun. We had 7 or 8,000 last night."

Cueto's year off might serve to postpone his barnstorming days and even prolong his career, said Arroyo, pointing out that the rehab process targets so much more than the arm.

"It might be a little disheartening now, but the good thing for Johnny is the freedom from all that stress in his mind," Arroyo said. "Just go in the weight room and get after it every day. He's been gifted enough to roll out of bed and just be a strong guy who gets outs. This is a chance for him maybe to learn about the science, learn about diet a little more. It can rejuvenate the entire body."

The future

If you ask Smoltz why only 18 of the last 500-plus pitchers to undergo Tommy John surgery have been over the age of 30, prepare to receive a sermon. This is a subject that he is so passionate about he included it in his Hall of Fame induction speech.

"You don't see a lot of older guys getting it because so many young guys are getting it so early," Smoltz said. "They're not hesitating. They're not even trying to get guys to pitch through it or rehab it, for the most part.

"It's because the myths about Tommy John surgery have been widely misreported. These parents and young kids, even 14, 15 years old, just don't understand the risks they're involving the earlier they have it. The myth is you'll be better. You'll throw harder. What reality tells you is if you have Tommy John in the big leagues, you've got a really, really good chance of getting back to the big leagues. If you have it at Single-A, you've got a good chance of getting back to Single-A. That's about it. You'll get back to the level you once were, for the most part, statistically."

Not all make it back. Former Brewers pitcher Manny Parra was 33 when he underwent Tommy John surgery two years ago. He hasn't returned to the big leagues, and was in the Giants' minor league camp this past spring. Josh Johnson, Sergio Santos and Joel Hanrahan are the other four pitchers in their 30s who are more than 14 months removed from their Tommy John surgeries within the past five years and haven't resurfaced in the big leagues. Nothing is guaranteed.

But they are in the minority.

The process has become so predictable for established big leaguers that another of Cueto's former rotation mates in Cincinnati, Edinson Vólquez, underwent the procedure last August, and the Texas Rangers signed him to a two-year contract so he could rehab and return to help them in 2019.

"A young guy who hasn't established himself — all he knows how to do is throw hard and hasn't really learned how to pitch — is the one who's more at risk, I think," Smoltz said. "So a guy like Cueto who knows how to pitch, it won't be an issue at all for him coming back. This is right up his alley to rehab and get back to the pitcher that he needs to be."

For a minor leaguer or rookie who blew out his elbow because of bad mechanics, it's a two-step process: he must go through the rehab protocol so he can return to a mound, then he has to relearn sound mechanics before he can advance his career.

Successful veterans have one step completed before they take off the bandages. They already know how to pitch.

Arroyo worked out with younger rehabbing pitchers and heard their complaints about struggling to find their old arm slot.

"For me, that wasn't a problem," Arroyo said. "Even in pain, I felt I could throw strikes all day. So for Johnny, he's a pinch past his prime, but that won't be a problem, either. What he will be up against is, can you get pain-free, completely? I wasn't pain-free at the ligament site, pretty much entirely. It never came back. But that's coming from a guy who was 37 and had his shoulder done. It was hard to separate the two.

"Every arm is different, every surgery is different. Did they move the nerve? Who did the surgery? That all makes a difference. But I don't think Johnny will have any problems as long as he's pain-free."

"Return to function" is not as scary a proposition as it sounds. Take it from Hudson, the Bluegrass barnstormer:

"Johnny's not a spring chicken anymore, but he's going to get through it, barring any setbacks," Hudson said. "He understands how to pitch and has really good sound mechanics. If he has to

take a week and back off, he needs to do that.

“But if he’s committed to doing everything right and going by the book and listening to his body, pump his brakes if he has to ... there’s a confidence in the surgery now. The history is there. There’s a track record of success with this.

“And we’re talking about Johnny Cueto. He’s such a pitcher.”

The Athletic

Derek Holland is happy to be on the good side as Evan Longoria powers the Giants to a win in Arizona

Andrew Baggarly

PHOENIX — It was the Fourth of July and 100 degrees at first pitch at the Ballpark in Arlington when a 22-year-old rookie left-hander named Derek Holland faced Evan Longoria for the first time.

Holland narrowly avoided rockets red glare on that sweltering afternoon in 2009. Longoria, already a 23-year-old star in his second season for the Tampa Bay Rays, flied out to the warning track.

Over the next decade, Holland would not be so lucky. Longoria hit .345 with four home runs and five doubles in 34 at-bats against the left-handed pitcher. One of the homers came in a wild 2010 AL Division Series in which the Rangers prevailed.

So when their careers intersected in the Giants’ spring clubhouse at Scottsdale Stadium, Holland made a point of greeting his new teammate with a question.

“What’s it like?” Holland said. “Am I throwing beach balls to you, or what?”

So when Longoria missed six weeks because of a fractured hand, Holland understood better than anyone how sorely the loss would be felt. And nobody understood better how Longoria’s return could boost a lineup that has struggled ever since early May.

They combined to deliver the Giants a 3-2 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks at Chase Field on Sunday.

Longoria fought off a pitch for a run-scoring single in the third inning. He doubled and scored a run in the sixth. Then he snapped a tie in the eighth when his home run off Archie Bradley cleared the high yellow line in center field. And Holland delivered another in a season-long string of credible starts, holding the Diamondbacks to two runs on three hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Holland did not last long enough for a decision, and the Giants needed plenty of outs from a better rested bullpen, with Reyes Moronta and Ray Black once again throwing smoke to get the

ball to closer Will Smith.

But Holland was able to hold down an Arizona lineup that had body-slammed the Giants for a five-run first inning in each of the two previous games.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy praised Holland for his adaptability as he shuttled between the rotation and bullpen. But before telling reporters how much he's enjoyed Holland's free-spirited humor, Bochy emphasized that the pitcher's stuff has impressed him, too.

"He's out there throwing hard with a changeup and a breaking ball," Bochy said. "That's what allowed him to adjust well from the bullpen to starting."

It helps that he doesn't have to face Longoria.

"If you look at the numbers, I'm not the guy you want to talk to. He crushes me," Holland said. "But no, he's been an outstanding hitter his whole career. He's had a wonderful career. He keeps getting better at everything and he's getting things going now, and this is a perfect time to do it. It just sucks with some of the injuries he's had to deal with."

Longoria is batting .357 with three doubles, a triple and two home runs in 10 games since returning from the fractured fifth metacarpal he sustained when hit by a pitch in Miami on June 14.

His absence was felt especially on the road — where every single Giants player with the exception of him had a lower OPS — as well as against left-handed starters, at a time when Bochy had trouble crafting a middle of the order with any teeth.

No coincidence: Longoria made the difference as the Giants won a road game against a left-handed starter.

"As much as anything, it's his balance up there," Bochy said. "It looks like he's seeing the ball well. He's quiet up there. He's a good hitter and it's good to see him coming off that rehab and finding his swing."

The bigger challenge for Longoria continues to be hitting at AT&T Park, where he has acknowledged feeling less comfortable.

"This place helps," Longoria said of Chase Field. "It's a good hitter's ballpark and you see the ball well. It has the ability to help you get back on track."

This would be a great time to find a comfort zone at home. The Giants return for six games with the Astros and Pirates, two of baseball's hottest teams, and one bad week would effectively end any thoughts of contending.

They really needed to do better than split this four-game series in Arizona. But a split was the best they could achieve on Sunday, and they did, thanks to a pair of former adversaries.

“I’ve faced him a lot, I’ve been around him and I’ve seen the way he works and it’s nice to see that success,” Longoria said. “He had some injury issues there for a couple of years and kind of was out of the picture. And for him to really resurrect himself and get back to where he was — when I remember facing him early on when we were both rookies or second- and third-year guys — it’s really nice. It just goes to show you that if you work hard and believe in yourself, you can do it. He’s been a big part of our success this year.”

For someone who has been so valuable to the Giants this season, Holland doesn’t make many assumptions. After a rougher outing, he’ll pledge to be better next time and almost beg for the chance. He takes the blame for a loss even when he gave the team every chance to win. His teammates have noticed.

“He thinks he’s going to be out of baseball every day,” Longoria said. “Every day he’s coming in here he feels like he’s going home. I don’t know if it’s the right mentality or not, but it’s kept him successful and driven this year, and he’s done a great job for us.”

Buster Posey passed concussion tests and started at first base on Sunday. Bochy said he expected that Posey would start behind the plate and catch Dereck Rodríguez on Monday against the Astros.