



SF Giants Press Clips Sunday, August 5, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Duggar homers as another rookie falters in loss to D'backs

Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — The Giants' goal every year is to win games and develop players. Longtime followers know they have waxed and waned in each endeavor over the years, with prospect growth often taking a backseat.

As the 2018 season grinds on, with the Giants at .500 for the 20th time since Opening Day, it becomes clearer by the game that development will jump into the forefront over the final two months.

The process can be painful and exhilarating at the same time, as it was in Saturday night's 9-3 loss to the Diamondbacks, which left the Giants 56-56.

One rookie, Andrew Suarez, was pummeled for eight runs in five innings, all scoring with two outs. Like Chris Stratton on Friday night, Suarez surrendered five in the first inning to place his team in an inextricable bind.

Another rookie, Steven Duggar, was on cloud nine.

Duggar hit his first big-league homer, off Clay Buchholz, with one out and nobody on in the fourth inning. He also made a ridiculous catch in right-center to rob David Peralta of a triple and legged out an infield single in the ninth.

One old-timer had a big game, too. Andrew McCutchen homered and doubled for two of his five hits. Games like that will boost his trade value should the Giants try to move him on a waiver deal in August.

McCutchen's nine total bases came in a six-run loss as the Giants — again — failed to get a big hit with runners in scoring position when they still had a fighting chance.

"What a day 'Cutch had," manager Bruce Bochy said. "Here our leadoff hitter gets five hits, a homer and an RBI double. You'd like to think you're in that game. Unfortunately we weren't."

Duggar homered a day after Bochy arranged a meeting with one of the skipper's former players, center fielder Steve Finley, to talk hitting. Finley hit 304 homers in a 19-year big-league career.

Duggar had heard comparisons to Finley for years. Bochy said their body types and even facial features are the same.

Finley was at Chase Field as part of a weekend alumni game and celebration of the Diamondbacks' 20th anniversary, and met Duggar in the batting cage before Friday's game.

"It was exciting, man," the rookie said. "When I got to my second big-league camp I thought it would be cool if I could meet him one day. I knew he played here. I didn't think he'd be here and I'd get to talk to him."

Finley was an excellent defender, too, and had to smile at Duggar's catch in the sixth.

Duggar was shaded two steps toward left field and ran nearly to the wall in right-center. He thought he might have to dive for the ball but sensed McCutchen coming. With an eye on his teammate, Duggar reached low and snowconed his ball, which popped into his glove fully as he rolled on the ground.

Peralta stood at third base in disbelief, unwilling to return to the dugout until his bench confirmed via video that Duggar really caught it.

Back to Suarez.

The left-hander is getting a common rookie comeuppance after a dominating stretch of six starts with a 2.00 ERA. His ERA in four starts since is 7.89, with 19 runs in 222/3 innings, including five home runs.

The Diamondbacks pummeled Suarez in rat-a-tat fashion in the first inning, the game going from 0-0 to 5-0 in the span of five pitches.

After protesting a strike call on a 3-0 pitch, Steven Souza Jr. hit a two-run triple. Nick Ahmed followed with an RBI single and Ketel Marte a two-run homer on the first pitch.

Suarez regrouped and held Arizona scoreless until the fifth, when Souza banged an RBI double off the overhang in center field and Ahmed homered for an 8-2 lead.

San Francisco Chronicle
After concussion test, Giants Buster Posey cleared to play
Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — The Giants believe **Buster Posey** dodged the worst from Friday night's foul tip to the mask. Manager **Bruce Bochy** said Posey passed a concussion test after doing cardio and swinging the bat Saturday, and he plans to play Posey at first base Sunday.

"Buster feels great," Bochy said. "It's really encouraging."

Posey had to leave Friday's game in the third inning. He got light-headed after he singled off **Patrick Corbin**, two innings after taking a **Paul Goldschmidt** foul tip to the mask.

As the Giants know all too well, concussion symptoms can appear any time, so the medical staff will check Posey again Sunday morning. Taking no chances, they had Triple-A catcher **Ronnie Freeman** fly in from Nashville, where Sacramento is playing. The 27-year-old former Diamondbacks minor-leaguer went on the taxi squad and was at Chase Field.

That left **Nick Hundley** as the only active catcher Saturday. The leading candidate for emergency duty was infielder **Chase d'Arnaud**. His brother, **Travis**, is a big-league catcher on the Mets' disabled list after Tommy John surgery.

"I figured it's in his bloodline, but I talked to (Chase) this morning and he said he's never caught," Bochy said.

Chase d'Arnaud is not sweating it.

"If Travis can catch, I can catch," he said. "I'm way more athletic than my kid brother."

Pitching moves: The Giants bolstered their bullpen with two call-ups from Sacramento, **Derek Law** and **Pierce Johnson**, who both got into Saturday night's loss.

Sent to Sacramento were pitcher **Chris Stratton** and infielder **Kelby Tomlinson**.

Law did not allow an earned run in 12 of his past 13 appearances for the River Cats, but he gave up an eighth inning homer Saturday to **Nick Ahmed**, the second of the game for the Arizona shortstop.

Johnson, who surrendered five earned runs over 16¹/₃ innings at Sacramento, pitched two shutout innings

Stratton allowed six runs in three-plus innings Friday night. He said he might work on his grip to avoid fastballs cutting over the plate.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants lose ground again, fall to .500 as Duggar flashes potential in blowout
Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—When the Giants opened the second half of the season with a 4.0 game deficit in the National League West, they knew they'd have to merge to the fast lane if they hoped to catch up to the pack.

Fourteen games after the All-Star break, the Giants are stuck in traffic, losing ground and plodding along instead of cruising on the open road.

After a starting pitcher allowed five first-inning runs for the second straight night, San Francisco couldn't drive up a hill that proved all too steep in a 9-3 loss to the Diamondbacks Saturday.

"The first inning, that's a big number to give up and that's an uphill climb for the guys," manager Bruce Bochy said. "As tough as it was going, we had men out there we just couldn't get one more hit to keep it moving."

For the 19th time this season, the Giants handed the keys to rookie left-hander Andrew Suárez, who turned in his worst night behind the wheel and the worst of any San Francisco starter this season. Suárez allowed 10 hits, four for extra bases, and gave up two home runs while surrendering a season-high eight runs over five innings of work.

“I think it’s just my mechanics are just a little bit off,” Suárez said. “I’m going to watch film tomorrow and get back and get ready for the next start.”

Both D’backs middle infielders took Suárez deep, as second baseman Ketel Marte sent a 112-mile per hour laser over the left center field wall in the first before shortstop Nick Ahmed launched a two-run screamer into the Arizona bullpen in the fifth. The homer was Ahmed’s 15th of the year, which is a benchmark no Giants player has hit yet this season.

Despite winning four in a row to begin the week, the Giants have lost back-to-back games and now sit 6.0 games out of first place. With a 56-56 record and 50 games left to play, the slim postseason odds that existed in the middle of July have largely evaporated due to a combination of inconsistent play and injuries that have wiped out core members of the roster.

Suárez’s ongoing struggles are becoming a greater concern for the Giants as he’s allowed 19 earned runs in his last four starts. After lowering his ERA nearly two full points from the beginning of June through the All-Star break, the rookie left-hander has given up at least eight hits in each of his past three outings.

“The stuff is really good, I think it’s his command more than anything that’s a little off,” Bochy said. “You look at the ball-strike ratio there early and he just wasn’t sharp.”

After Chris Stratton allowed five first-inning runs in a three-inning start Friday, the Giants needed to adjust their roster to provide coverage in the bullpen. San Francisco optioned Stratton and infielder Kelby Tomlinson to make room for relievers Pierce Johnson and Derek Law, who both appeared in relief of Suárez Saturday.

Johnson was on the mound in the bottom of the sixth inning when a fellow rookie turned in the best defensive play of his young career. After slugging his first career home run in the fourth, center fielder Steven Duggar ranged into the right center field gap and made a phenomenal catch that finished with a tumble to rob David Peralta of extra bases.

“It was one of those where you don’t know if you’re going to lay out,” Duggar said. “We kind of got in no man’s land and I just felt Cutch’s presence at the last second. I tried to avoid him and just stick my glove out and just tried to hold onto it.”

Duggar met former Giants outfielder Steve Finley before Friday’s game at Chase Field as manager Bruce Bochy was hoping Finley could pass along a few tips to a player with a similar skill set. Finley won five Gold Gloves in his major league career and Duggar drew comparisons

to the 19-year major league veteran throughout his rise in the Giants' minor league system.

"I'm just extremely honored for one to have a comparison to Steve Finley," Duggar said. "I used to watch him and that was really cool. Being able to meet him and talk a little bit, learning offensively to kind of take what the pitcher gives you and little things like that was a lot of fun."

Duggar and right fielder Andrew McCutchen were the only Giants to have big nights, but that could bode well for the club moving forward. The Giants are hopeful Duggar has the ability to develop into the everyday center fielder of the future, and if they feel there's too much ground to overcome in the playoff race, they'll trade McCutchen with the goal of having another team take on the remaining salary the Giants owe him.

With five hits and a home run, McCutchen has added to his potential trade value should the Giants elect to place him on waivers in August.

"What a day Cutch had," Bochy said. "Just a great game. Here's your leadoff hitter, he gets five hits, a home run, an RBI double. You'd like to think you're in the game."

Posey slated to play Sunday

A night after exiting a game feeling light-headed, Buster Posey was out of the Giants lineup and in concussion protocol.

Posey took a foul tip off of his catcher's mask in the first inning Friday and was removed after running to first base on a single in the third inning. The Giants added Triple-A catcher Ronnie Freeman to the taxi squad as a precautionary measure, but Posey remained active Saturday and if he remains symptom-free, Bochy says Posey will play first base Sunday.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants add two pitchers to bullpen, update Buster Posey's status

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—When Buster Posey left Friday's game feeling light-headed, the Giants were immediately concerned about both the short-term and long-term future of their starting catcher.

Though Posey will remain in concussion protocol, some of the Giants' concerns have been

alleviated as manager Bruce Bochy reported Posey is feeling “great.”

“With that said, he’s still going to go through the protocol,” Bochy said. “He worked out, did his cardio and he’ll take some swings. Then he’ll go through another concussion test and we’ll know where we’re at. We’re really optimistic.”

Get San Francisco Giants news in your inbox. Sign up now for the free Giants HQ newsletter.

Triple-A catcher Ronnie Freeman was added to the Giants’ taxi squad Saturday in the event Posey’s symptoms linger, but San Francisco has no plans to activate Freeman unless it becomes necessary. Reserve Nick Hundley will start at catcher Saturday while infielder Chase d’Arnaud will serve as the team’s emergency catcher.

Freeman was a fifth round draft choice of the D’backs in 2012 and signed with the Giants as a minor league free agent this offseason. He has never appeared in a major league game and is hitting .232 in 45 games for Sacramento this season.

If Posey passes his test, he could return to the lineup as the team’s first baseman for Sunday’s series finale in Arizona.

While the Giants are waiting to see if they’ll need to adjust their depth chart at catcher, the club added two pitchers to the 25-man roster Saturday. Right-handed relievers Pierce Johnson and Derek Law flew into Phoenix from Nashville Saturday morning after playing with the Sacramento River Cats in Memphis Friday.

To clear space for Johnson and Law, San Francisco optioned infielder Kelby Tomlinson and Friday’s starting pitcher Chris Stratton to Sacramento. After Stratton allowed five runs in the first inning and lasted just three innings in a 6-3 loss to Arizona Friday, Bochy said the right-hander is lacking confidence and struggling with fastball command.

Both Johnson and Law have spent time with the Giants this season and pitched well for Triple-A Sacramento over the past few weeks. Johnson has a 5.75 ERA in 28 appearances with the Giants this year but a 2.76 ERA in 12 games with the River Cats. Law posted a 7.00 ERA in four games with San Francisco, but hasn’t allowed an earned run in 12 of his last 13 games for Sacramento.

“Both are throwing well,” Bochy said. “Derek’s been throwing the ball very well as Pierce has been. They’re two of our guys that have been up here and have experience and more

importantly, they've been throwing the ball well."

Barring an injury to a player on the 25-man roster, Stratton won't be eligible to return to the Giants for the next 10 days. The club doesn't need a fifth starter this week due to an off day Wednesday, but the Giants often look to build in additional days of rest for their starters.

Bochy said he has not committed to skipping a fifth starter during the next turn through the Giants rotation, but it remains a possibility. The Giants could insert reliever Ty Blach back into the rotation as he won't be used out of the bullpen for the next few days after throwing a combined 4 1/3 innings of scoreless ball over the past two games.

Bochy also hinted that Triple-A starter Casey Kelly has impressed the team of late with his performance for the River Cats and he could be promoted at some point this season if the Giants are looking for another option in the rotation.

MLB.com

Big night for Duggar, Cutch not enough for SF Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- **Steven Duggar** hit his first Major League homer in the fourth inning and also made a long running catch in right-center field in the sixth on Saturday, the primary takeaways -- along with right fielder **Andrew McCutchen's** five-hit game -- in a 9-3 loss to the D-backs.

The Giants again had trouble with the big inning, as the D-backs scored their game-determining first eight runs with two outs in the third game of a four-game series at Chase Field.

View Full Game Coverage

Left-hander **Andrew Suarez**, who had one of his best outings of the season in his June 29 appearance at Chase Field, could not find the one pitch that could stanch the D-backs' big innings, a five-run first and three-run fifth. He wound up surrendering eight runs on 10 hits and two walks in five innings.

Ketel Marte hit a breaking ball for a two-run homer to cap the first inning, when all the runs scored with two outs. The D-backs scored five runs in the first inning off **Chris Stratton** in a 6-3 victory Friday, four with two outs.

Duggar and McCutchen were the lone bright spots for the Giants on a tough night when the

lineup was unable to find its rhythm, despite a total of 11 hits. Duggar had two of those hits, including a solo shot in the fourth inning.

McCutchen drove in the other two of San Francisco's three runs, getting his team on the board with a solo home run in the third inning and doubling in a run in the ninth with his fifth hit of the game.

"We had men out there," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "We just couldn't get one hit to keep it going."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

The Giants could not take advantage of some early opportunities to chip away at an early deficit.

They left runners on first and second when Duggar and starting pitcher Andrew Suarez struck out to end the second inning, left runners on first and second when **Joe Panik** grounded out to end the third and left runners on second and third when **Evan Longoria** took a called third strike to end the fourth. All four of those outs came on offspeed pitches.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Duggar made a remarkable running catch on Peralta's fly to deep right-center field in the sixth inning, taking the ball off his shoe tops in the very tip of his glove before securing it.

It was a 4-Star catch, according to **Statcast™**, with a 31 percent catch probability. Duggar had to cover 112 feet in 5.5 seconds, and he got up to a sprint speed of 30.3 feet per second (30-plus is considered elite speed).

"It was high enough, so I just put my head down and started running," Duggar said. "It was one of those balls kind of in no-man's land. You don't know how far 'Cutch' is from it. I had a beat on it, but at the same time you don't know if you are going to lay out or not."

"I kind of felt Cutch's presence at the last second and tried to avoid him and just stick my glove out and try to hold onto it. I felt it in my glove, but I felt it starting to come out so I just tried to squeeze as hard as I could and fortunately hung onto it."

HE SAID IT

"This is a young kid. He's going to have little runs where he might not be quite as sharp in some of his starts. This is part of the growing process for him to become a better pitcher." -- *Bochy, on Suarez, who gave up eight runs -- all scoring with two outs -- in five innings*

UP NEXT

After losing **Johnny Cueto** and **Pablo Sandoval** for the season earlier last week, the Giants can hope for the return of **Buster Posey** on Sunday. He was removed Friday and did not play Saturday while being monitored for concussion symptoms. Starter **Derek Holland** has given up four earned runs in his last three starts. He'll face D-backs lefty **Robbie Ray** in a 1:10 p.m. PT tilt.

MLB.com

Posey 'feeling great' after concussion scare

Jack Magruder

PHOENIX -- The Giants made four roster moves Saturday, but most notable was the one they were not forced to make.

Catcher **Buster Posey**, who was removed in the third inning of Friday's game at Arizona to be **monitored for concussion symptoms**, is "feeling great," manager Bruce Bochy said.

View Full Game Coverage

Bochy did not rule out the possibility that Posey, with continued progress, could play Sunday, although it would be at first base.

Posey went through the concussion protocol Saturday.

"He worked out. He did his cardio. He's going to take some swings," Bochy said. "I think they are going to run him outside. Then he'll go through another concussion test and we'll know where we are at.

"We are really optimistic as to how he feels right now. It's really encouraging for him."

Right-handed relievers **Pierce Johnson** and **Derek Law** were recalled from Triple-A on Saturday when Friday's starter **Chris Stratton** and **Kelby Tomlinson** were optioned to Sacramento.

Posey left Friday after feeling lightheaded at first base following a single to right field. **Nick Hundley** pinch-ran and stayed in the game at first base. Hundley started Saturday and is the only available catcher on the roster.

Bochy said infielder **Chase d'Arnaud** would be the front-runner for emergency catching duty after talking to him earlier Saturday. d'Arnaud's brother, Travis, is a catcher in the Mets' organization. Sacramento catcher **Ronnie Freeman** was flown to Phoenix just in case a move

had been necessary for Posey.

Stocking the 'pen

Johnson and Law added fresh arms to a bullpen that was used for eight innings in the first two games of D-backs' series against the Giants. After pitching 4 1/3 innings in the two games, left-hander **Ty Blach** is likely out for a day or two.

"It was a situation where we needed help today," Bochy said.

The Giants have a day off Wednesday, when Stratton's next start would have fallen, but they have options. Blach could make a spot start Thursday to give the rest of the starters an extra day, or the Giants could remain in rotation after the off-day, as all would be on normal four days' rest.

Johnson, recalled for the fourth time this season, has appeared in 24 games with the Giants, going 3-2 with a 5.75 ERA. He had four saves in 12 appearances at Sacramento.

Law has spent most of the season at Sacramento, where he had a 3.74 ERA in 28 games. He has pitched well recently, giving up only two earned runs in his last 13 games, a 1.17 ERA.

Promoting a pitcher such as Tyler Rogers and/or **Casey Kelly** would have been more difficult, as neither is on the 40-man roster.

"We talked about all our options," Bochy said.

A proper introduction

Giants center fielder **Steven Duggar** has heard comparisons to Steve Finley since his first Major League camp. They make perfect sense.

Similar body type. Similar facial features. Most importantly, similar skill set.

So on Friday, manager Bruce Bochy introduced Duggar to Finley, a two-time All-Star and five-time Gold Glove center fielder who spent four good seasons with Bochy in San Diego.

Something seemed to rub off.

Duggar hit his first Major League homer in the fourth inning and also made a long running catch in right-center field in the sixth on Saturday in a **9-3 loss** to the D-backs.

"Just exciting being able to meet him," Duggar said. "Extremely honored, for one, to have a comparison to Steve Finley. I used to watch him growing up. That was really cool."

Finley was named the center fielder on Arizona's 20th anniversary team, and he was in town this weekend as part of the celebration. Bochy wanted to make sure they met.

"I knew he played here, but I didn't know he was going to actually be here," Duggar said.

"When I first saw him, I said 'Aw, this is going to be cool.' Definitely a fun moment. Being able to talk a little bit. Learning offensively. Taking what the pitcher gives you. Little things like that, it was a lot of fun to be able to chat with him for a little bit behind the turtle [batting cage]."

Duggar, 6-foot-2 and 189, hit his homer in his 20th Major League game, and like Finley also has a speed component to his game. Duggar has two stolen bases this season and had 51 in his Minor League career since being a sixth-round choice out of Clemson in the 2015 draft.

Finley, 6-foot-2 and 175, had 304 homers and 320 stolen bases in a 19-year Major League career. He was with Bochy in San Diego from 1995-98 before signing with Arizona, and was a member of their 2001 World Series winner.

"Steve [Finley] was telling him when he was young he was a line-drive hitter and tried to use the whole field, and the power came a little bit later," Bochy said. "I had some good years with him."

On the defensive play of the game, Duggar set up a couple of steps into left field, giving him even more ground to cover before taking extra bases away from **David Peralta** with a lunging, snow-cone catch.

"It was high enough, so I just put my head down and started running," Duggar said. "It was one of those balls kind of in no-man's land. You don't know how far 'Cutch' is from it. I had a beat on it, but at the same time you don't know if you are going to lay out or not."

"I kind of felt Cutch's presence at the last second and tried to avoid him and just stick my glove out and try to hold onto it. I felt it in my glove, but I felt it starting to come out so I just tried to squeeze as hard as I could and fortunately hung onto it."

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants rookie Steven Duggar shows skills at plate and in center field

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — In his first big-league camp, Steven Duggar heard two comparisons over and over again. Steve Finley, the longtime, big-league center fielder, and Brandon Crawford, the star he was hoping to join one day. In his second camp, Duggar noticed that coaches and teammates started zeroing in on Finley.

The two have similarly sweet swings from the left side and aggressive approaches in center field. They have the same build, and manager Bruce Bochy said he even sees similarities in their faces. Duggar appreciated being compared to a man who made two All-Star teams, won five Gold Glove Awards, and hit 304 homers.

“I was like, that would be cool if I could meet him one day,” Duggar said Saturday night.

Bochy made it happen on Friday afternoon. Finley was in town for a Diamondbacks 20th anniversary celebration and the two were introduced.

“Both had heard about each other,” Bochy said. “Their body types, I mean, it’s identical. Steve was telling him that when he was younger he was a line-drive hitter who used the whole field, and the power came later.”

The power came later for Duggar, too. A day later.

The rookie jumped on a Clay Buchholz curveball in the fourth inning and lofted a high shot down the line that cleared the fence a few feet from the visiting bullpen. The homer was the first in the big leagues for Duggar, who hit just 21 in 310 minor league games, but has shown more pop over the last year.

It was a rough night for the Giants, but Duggar — **in a 9-3 loss** — showed off all the skills that could make him a future star. In addition to the homer, he made a spectacular catch in center field, snow-coning a ball in the right-center gap after traveling 114 feet to get to the spot. Duggar had a sprint speed of 30.3 seconds as he chased the ball, an elite level for major leaguers. He had been waiting for a chance to really go after a ball. This was it.

“I was actually a couple of steps over into left because (David Peralta) has just seemed to barrel the ball all over the place,” he said. “It was hit high enough that I just put my head down and started running. It was kind of in no-man’s land. I felt (Andrew McCutchen’s) presence at the last second. I tried to avoid him and just stuck my glove out.”

Duggar tumbled to the grass, tightening his grip on the ball as he fell. Peralta stood on third base and looked back at the gap in disbelief. Finally, third base coach Tony Perezchica explained to him what had happened.

Duggar wasn't done, though. In the ninth, he hit a hard chopper to third and Eduardo Escobar attempted to spin and throw. He took a beat too long, and Duggar beat the throw for an infield single. He reached 30.2 feet per second on that dash.

On a night he showed all his physical gifts, Duggar also showed some savvy. After the homer, he reached the top step of the dugout and noticed all his teammates sitting down. The rookie's adrenaline was pumping, but he knew he was in for the silent treatment, and calmly started to take his gear off until his teammates were ready to celebrate.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants Notes

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — After a couple of shaky starts early in his career, Andrew Suarez promised to dig deep into the laptop. He made some adjustments and responded by allowing eight total runs over a six-start span.

The rookie left-hander allowed eight runs in just five innings Saturday night in a 9-3 loss to Arizona. It's back to the laptop.

"My mechanics are just a little bit off," Suarez said. "I'll go watch film tomorrow and get ready for the next start."

Whatever is causing Suarez to speed up his delivery and leave so many pitches over the heart of the plate didn't start Saturday. He has allowed 19 runs over his past four starts, failing to pitch six innings in three of them. The Diamondbacks jumped on him early, getting five in the first — just as they did against Chris Stratton — and then three more in the fifth. Ketel Marte and Nick Ahmed hit homers.

Suarez said he feels fine physically, and there's no reason why he should be gassed. He has thrown 129 innings in the majors and minors this season, less than in each of the previous two seasons. He should have plenty left in the tank.

"We gave him an extra day (of rest). We're keeping an eye on him, but you look at the velo and

for three innings (tonight) I thought he had really good stuff,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “You know what, this is a young kid. He’s going to have runs where he might not be as sharp. This is part of the growing process.”

--- Buster Posey passed a pre-game concussion test and could start at first base on Sunday, Bochy said. This is all good news, but it also led to a strange situation. Ron Freeman was brought in as a taxi squad catcher but wasn’t needed. Freeman, who has never played in the big leagues, was in the clubhouse afterward, apparently waiting for a return trip to Triple-A. The postgame spread looked good, at least.

It has to be brutal to get that close to a big-league field after so many years in the minors, and then not actually get onto the roster, but there still could be a happy ending here. The Giants will need a third catcher in September, and team officials chose Freeman over Trevor Brown on Saturday. Ryan Hanigan parted ways with the organization last month. Unless Aramis Garcia gets a bump from Double-A, it appears Freeman will make his big-league debut next month.

--- Pierce Johnson and Derek Law, called up earlier in the day, both got into the game. Johnson pitched two scoreless innings, getting a little help from **Steven Duggar in center field**. Law wasn’t as successful; Nick Ahmed greeted him with a solo homer.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

First inning dooms Giants again in second straight loss to D’backs

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — There are times when this game is remarkably simple. If you give up five runs in the first inning, you almost certainly are not going to end your night with a handshake line.

For a second straight night, the Giants starter did just that. For a second straight night, the Giants lost to the Diamondbacks, dropping further behind in the NL West. The 9-3 defeat put them six out, with a brutal stretch coming up. After one more in Phoenix, they’ll host the World Champion Astros and then the red-hot Pirates.

The Giants have walked a tightrope for four months. They may finally be on the verge of falling. Here’s what you need to know from the night they once again dropped back to .500...

— Andrew Suarez struggled with his command early and the Diamondbacks took advantage. Steven Souza hit a two-run triple and Ketel Marte bashed a two-run homer to left. Suarez settled in, but then threw another series of meatballs in the fifth, giving up three runs and a

homer from Nick Ahmed.

— Suarez has gone backwards in recent weeks. In all, he gave up eight earned in five innings Saturday and has been charged with 19 earned runs in his last four starts. Suarez gave up eight runs total during a six-start stretch earlier this summer.

— Steven Duggar got a curveball down and in, the happy zone for most left-handers, and jumped on it for his first big-league homer. Duggar hit a high shot that landed just over the fence in right, and when he returned to the dugout, he was greeted with the **old silent treatment from Giants veterans**.

— Andrew McCutchen had five hits, including a solo homer. He has two homers since the trade deadline passed. The Giants still can trade him through the waiver system, and he certainly is doing nothing but upping his value.

The Athletic

Giants' Dereck Rodriguez has seen this circle of baseball life before Lisa Olson

PHOENIX — A few packed a soft paunch, and did nifty limping jogs around the bases. Then there was Randy Johnson, still as lean as a palm branch and finally seeming comfortable in his skin, and Curt Schilling, the jawing captain of Team Red, and Luís González, missing much of his hair but otherwise looking as if he could easily nudge a blooper off the game's best closer to seal one of history's most magical World Series titles.

The Diamondbacks celebrated the 20th anniversary of their inaugural season in the Arizona desert Saturday afternoon, and for those who get chills from nostalgia or wistful when time passes in a blink, it was something to watch.

It even captured the fancy of a few Giants as they meandered around the visitors' clubhouse at Chase Field, not quite sure what to do with themselves since batting practice had been supplanted by a rather comical old-timers game between the aging former D-Backs. Baseball measures time a bit differently, and here in the Valley of the Sun the delineation tilts from October 2001, which still stands as Arizona's finest sporting moment ever.

Of course, Giants fans might rightly scoff at the notion of celebrating one measly championship in two long decades. Three rings in eight years tend to make folks greedy and slightly entitled. Rebuilding is a luxury the Giants never seem to have.

"Fine by me," Dereck Rodríguez, the Giants' angular righty, was saying as he watched the Arizona oldsters lollygag around the bases on a TV screen near his locker. "When I was called up, I was told we weren't in a rebuilding mode. It meant a lot that the Giants organization had the confidence not just in me, but in the players who are here."

Across the room, two new faces tucked into their pregame meals, equally groggy and clear-eyed, if that seems possible. Pierce Johnson and Derek Law were riding the Triple-A bus from Memphis to Nashville on Friday night when word came down: The Giants keep dropping like gnats, please send fresh bodies. The two players grabbed window seats on a 6 a.m. Southwest flight out of Tennessee, and then here they were, shoving down fresh meatballs and sauce as if it were their first decent meal in ages.

Rodríguez chuckled at the sight. Barely two months have passed since he got his own call to The Show, and it's only slight hyperbole to say he's been the headiest revelation on a team that can't quite figure itself out. Are the Giants playoff contenders, or will this season be remembered as the one that was at least better than the previous nightmare? Will Buster Posey return to catcher, or do the Giants owe it to him and his legacy to force a permanent move to first before his body crumbles for good? Has the team been stripped of its *joie de vivre* now that the irrepressible Pablo Sandoval has been sidelined by hamstring surgery? Are the baseball gods done snapping veterans from the roster now that Johnny Cueto is having Tommy John surgery, and wouldn't that be something if the suddenly fresh-faced Giants continue to remain competitive through summer's tail end?

Rodríguez nodded patiently at my rapid-fire questions. He has a unique vantage point to these baseball conundrums, an old soul of the game at barely 26 years of age. For one, the retired vets on the field were contemporaries of his father, the Hall of Fame catcher named Pudge, so Rodríguez sees them through a different lens. He eschewed his dad's position, and while he talks politely, if briefly, about his dad when asked, his eyes gleam when he shares tales of his mother, Maribel, taking him to Cooperstown as a kid or to the Dominican Republic for tournaments. And for two, he only picked up pitching five years ago, and didn't exactly cause folks to genuflect during his time in the Pacific Coast League.

Ah, but isn't that the beauty of what is otherwise so far a humdrum season?

Rodríguez, with the Batman logo seared across his practice jersey's wide back, and his flowing hair tucked into a partial man bun, is a bundle of potential. And as August settles in, "potential" remains a happy buzzword around this club. While Arizona and the Dodgers are currently seesawing atop the NL West leaderboard, the Giants are six games back after Saturday's loss. Flash back to this time last year, Giants fans, and try not to smile.

"There's hope. We put together one great week or two good weeks, and everything changes," said Rodríguez, before the Giants lost to the D-Backs, 9-3. "Or one bad week from one of the division's other teams, and everything's different."

The beauty of baseball is in its rhythms, its lineages, its fresh bodies coming and going, its superstars aging and retiring and popping up again to remind us that nothing is set in stone. Nobody much expected the old Diamondbacks who were lumbering across the field and taking selfies Saturday night to win it all in 2001, when the Yankees, of all clubs, had America's heart. They were the team of Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera, two of the Fab Five, a team that gave a wounded city great joy so soon after the 9/11 terror attacks.

Rodríguez was in grade school then, old enough to understand what baseball meant here and back in New York. He knows what the odd tandem of Schilling and Johnson meant to the D-Backs, that Rivera was suddenly fallible. He thinks he knows what it feels like to be settled in, no longer starry-eyed on a Giants team suddenly bereft of stars, his 5-1 record and 2.59 ERA and 1.12 WHIP a small sample size, sure, but bright enough to wonder whether he's capable of being a top of the rotation fixture in years to come. His next start is Monday against Houston.

Such are the rumblings of August, when nothing is concrete and it's fun wondering what grand mysteries this postseason might bring. As Rodríguez bids adieu to go stretch, Luís González, the star of October 2001, basks in the mighty roar from an appreciative crowd, a fresh reminder of baseball's genealogy. The Giants chose González's son, Jacob, with the 58th overall pick in 2017, and he's now in Augusta, Georgia, clawing his way through the minors.

"I was in Sacramento about to go bed, 12:30 at night, when I got the call. I was on a 5 a.m. flight to Colorado," Rodríguez said, recalling that moment earlier this season, when he joined these mercurial Giants. "It was a quick turnaround and then I didn't even get to warm up in the bullpen. I had to warm up in front of everyone. Since then it's been kind of a blur."

Yes, that is baseball in a fine nutshell. The innings and the years go by in a blur.

The Athletic

A Cal League education has Giants prospect Conner Menez on the big league path

Melissa Lockard

In June 2016, Conner Menez realized a dream when he was selected by his favorite team in the 14th round of the MLB Draft. Now more than two years into his professional career, Menez is on track to realize an even bigger dream — pitching at the major league level for the Giants.

"It was the best day of my life," Menez said over the phone Tuesday about his draft day experience. "The Giants were the number one team that I could be drafted by because I grew up watching all of those guys. It was a pretty special moment when the Giants called and picked me."

Coming out of high school, Menez wasn't on the draft radar. The native of Hollister says he didn't draw much interest from big Division I baseball programs coming out of San Benito High, so he decided to attend The Master's University, a school that his dad and several other members of his family had matriculated from. Menez, 23, is looking to join Mark Redman and Jerry Owens as the only alumni of the school to play in the big leagues.

A growth spurt and a good stint in front of scouts in the Alaskan Summer League in 2015 finally placed Menez on the radar for the draft. After a strong junior season, he landed with the Giants early on Day 3 of the 2016 draft. It was apparent not long after the 6-foot-3 left-hander signed with the Giants that he had the polish to pitch against more advanced competition. He made eight appearances (21 innings) in the Arizona Rookie League and one start for Short-season

Salem-Keizer before jumping to the High-A San Jose Giants for the final month of his professional debut season.

Despite his lack of professional experience, Menez held his own in the Cal League in 2016, posting a 4.94 ERA in 27 1/3 innings. He returned to San Jose for the entire 2017 season, throwing a team-high 114 1/3 innings and earning San Jose's pitcher of the year award.

Although Menez had plenty of innings in the Cal League coming into the 2018 season, he opened the campaign in the San Jose rotation. He had nearly two full seasons' worth of starts in the Cal League under his belt before he earned the promotion to Double-A Richmond on June 14. From 2016-2018, Menez made 40 appearances (38 starts) for San Jose, racking up a 4.59 ERA but a more impressive 189:82 K:BB. This season with the Giants, Menez struck out 70 in 50 1/3 innings.

Menez says spending so much time in the hitter-friendly California League forced him to become better at hitting his spots.

"The Cal League is meant for hitters," Menez said. "There's short porches everywhere and the ball flies everywhere, so, honestly, it probably helped me when getting up to here in keeping the ball down, changing speeds really well, which is kind of what you want to do in general, but that helped emphasize that for me even more."

Since reaching Double-A, Menez has seen his strikeouts dip (57 in 50 1/3 innings), but his other numbers — walk rate, hit rate, ERA, home run rate — have remained pretty consistent against more advanced hitters. Despite the similar results, Menez says there is a noticeable difference in skill-level between the High-A and Double-A hitters.

"It's kind of like going from facing the JV team to the varsity team in terms of the difference in hitters," he said. "They have a lot more of an approach. Down in the Cal League, there's a lot of free swingers, guys who want to ambush pitchers. These guys are more patient on you, waiting for their pitch in their zones. You've kind of got to pitch to that accordingly."

Menez threw six scoreless innings in his first start with the Flying Squirrels, but he followed that start with three mediocre outings before running off a streak of four straight starts going at least 5 2/3 innings and allowing two or fewer runs. That streak ended on Friday, when he allowed seven runs in five innings in his most recent outing.

Menez says he made a slight mechanical adjustment after those first few Double-A outings that allowed him to find success.

"I focused on getting my arm going faster and getting on top of the ball, which helps create more of a down-angle towards the plate," he said. "Something kind of clicked where I got my rhythm going, staying downhill towards the plate and changing speeds."

Menez is a four-pitch pitcher — fastball, curveball, slider and changeup. His fastball sits 90-93 mph, but he gets significant movement to both sides of the plate, making it a very effective pitch. His slider and curveball are both swing-and-miss offerings when he's throwing them well and his changeup can be used to keep hitters off the fastball.

But what really makes Menez effective is his delivery, which is a little Madison Bumgarner-esque in how he hides the ball behind his back before he releases it, creating the illusion for the hitter that the pitch is coming in faster than it says on the radar gun.

Menez appears to be inching closer to joining Bumgarner in the Giants rotation in the not-so-distant future. By the end of this season, he will likely have more than 70 innings at the Double-A level under his belt. He also made two spot starts with Triple-A Sacramento earlier in the year. He says those outings — in which he allowed four runs in 11 innings — gave him the confidence that he can pitch against upper-level hitters.

“I’m glad they gave me that opportunity to have those spot starts up in Triple-A and see how my stuff faces up against those upper-level/major league hitters and to see that I have a chance to make it up really far,” Menez said. “It gave me really good confidence to have been able to go up to Triple-A and know, ‘hey, I can get these guys out.’ It was a really cool experience.”

The Athletic

Steven Duggar meets his spitting image and hits his first homer as Giants hope to break a sad cycle in center field

Andrew Baggarly

PHOENIX — The Giants tried for years to acquire Steve Finley.

They tried to sign him as a free agent. They tried to trade for him. They put in waiver claims on him. They viewed him as a perfect fit for AT&T Park with his gliding range in center field, his steadiness, his durability and his versatility to contribute as a table-setter or as a run producer.

By the time they hooked their white whale, trading Edgardo Alfonzo to the Angels for Finley in a swap of bad contracts to declining players, it was 2006 and their brand new center fielder was 41 years old. You can imagine how that turned out.

Finley showed flashes of his former all-around ability — he drew almost as many walks as strikeouts, and his 12 triples matched the most Willie Mays ever hit in a season in San Francisco — but he petered out the way so many aging veterans do. He did something to help you win a game four days a week. Then three. Then two. Then he was rolling over fastballs to the second baseman, and someone else replaced him in the lineup. Finley hit .246 that season, and then he was gone. To the very end, he insisted all he needed was more playing time to get in a groove.

It’s probably occurred to you that the Giants did no better in center field over the subsequent decade. They signed 35-year-old Dave Roberts to a three-year deal that didn’t work out. They gave 30-year-old Aaron Rowand a five-year, \$60 million deal that was viewed as a massive overpay the day it was announced, then set a record for digesting dollars when they released him with one month plus one season remaining on it. Ángel Pagán was a great get as a 30-year-old in a trade with the New York Mets, fueling the lineup of a World Series winner in 2012, and

then he wasn't so great — or so healthy — after signing a four-year, \$40 million extension. Petulance without performance makes for a bitter drink.

The Giants should have been wearing oven mitts on both hands by now, given how many times they got burned by signing a veteran center fielder on the downslope and sticking them in one of the most demanding patches of grass to patrol in the major leagues. But then the hot stove started piping again, and they eagerly rested two palms and three years on 32-year-old Denard Span.

They ditched Span's contract this past winter ... and signed 31-year-old Austin Jackson to a two-year contract, acknowledging his declining defensive metrics while saying he wouldn't be any more than a part-time center fielder. Then Jackson started 35 of his 36 games in center field on predictably shaky legs. At least the front office swallowed its pride and swiftly acknowledged its mistake last month, essentially selling a Single-A pitching prospect by attaching Jackson's contract to him in a trade with the Texas Rangers.

The Giants even put too much faith for too long in Andrés Torres, bless him, to keep doing what he did in 2010.

Since the Giants moved into AT&T Park 19 years ago, there have been 22 instances in which a player logged at least 100 games while playing at least 50 percent of them as a center fielder. The median age of those players is 31.8 years. The youngest of those 22 players was a 27-year-old Jason Ellison, in 2005.

Take all of that history, all of those repeated mistakes, all of those singles that fell at feet and all those balls that weren't cut off in a gap, and sew together a sagging backdrop out of it.

Then put Steven Duggar in front of it.

You can understand why the Giants are so excited about their 24-year-old rookie, who played in his 20th major league game Saturday night and hit his first home run while also sprinting half a football field to make a catch at the warning track in right-center.

"The body type," said Giants manager Bruce Bochy, "it's identical to when Fins was young."

Finley played for Felipe Alou in 2006, not Bochy, who would arrive as the Giants' manager a year later. But Bochy had Finley for four seasons from 1995-98 in San Diego, where he was an integral part of a club that won the NL pennant.

Looking at Duggar's 6-foot-2 frame, his athleticism, his left-handed swing, his strike-zone awareness and his even temperament, Bochy sees Finley. The two center fielders even have the same jaw line.

Bochy is not alone. Duggar said he first heard the Finley comparison in his first draft camp with the Giants in 2015 after they took him in the sixth round out of Clemson. Gary Davenport, who managed Duggar in short-season ball that summer, dropped Finley's name. It almost became comic. A coach would walk up to him and say, "You know, have you ever been told ..."

"When the second big league camp came around, I started getting more Steve Finleys," Duggar said. "I thought, 'It'd be cool to get to meet him one day.'"

On Friday, he did. Finley was at Chase Field for a Diamondbacks alumni game, and Bochy made certain that his current and former center fielders would cross paths. They met behind the batting cage and chatted for a few minutes.

“I was completely thrown off guard,” Duggar said. “I knew he played here, but I didn’t know he’d be here. Bochy called me over and when I first saw him, it’s like, ‘This is going to be cool.’ Definitely a fun, cool moment.”

It wasn’t a cool moment in the sixth inning for Arizona’s David Peralta, who thought he had his ninth hit in three games when Duggar closed on his drive to the gap and kept his concentration as he nearly crossed paths with Andrew McCutchen while making a Sno-Cone catch.

Peralta stood on second base with a look of disbelief and waited until the video board displayed a replay.

“Actually, I was a couple steps over towards left because it seems he’s been barreling balls all over the place,” Duggar said. “I put my head down and started running. It’s one of those balls in no man’s land. I had a bead on it, but you don’t know if you’ll lay out for it. I felt Cutch’s presence at the last second.”

So Duggar stayed on his feet. He stuck out an arm and made the catch anyway.

“I felt it in my glove, but I felt it starting to come out,” he said. “I just squeezed as hard as I could and tried to hold onto it.”

The Giants could say the same about their playoff hopes, except it is getting harder and harder to hold on. They gave up five runs in the first inning for the second consecutive game, it was Andrew Suárez’s turn to take his lumps Saturday — and their 9-3 loss to the Diamondbacks has them back at .500 and poised to shift gears.

Giants executive vice president Brian Sabean said after Tuesday’s uneventful trade deadline that the front office “went into this year trying ... to win and develop. And I think we’re even more poised to want to develop if you look at some of the younger folks that have been introduced and had their cameos and have done extremely well.”

Every loss is pushing them out of the Venn diagram and into the realm of pure development.

McCutchen went 5 for 5 with a home run and a double, and his uptick in performance, paired with another loss, should only accelerate his exit to a contending club.

The Giants are sure to place him on revocable waivers, if they haven’t already, and then see which team gets awarded the claim so they can explore a deal. Because National League clubs get first crack by reverse order of the standings, it’s interesting to note that his former team, the Pirates, have the clearest shot at him among those in contention. The Phillies need outfield help as well. If McCutchen gets through the NL waiver wire, the Indians and Yankees figure to be involved.

The Giants won’t get much for McCutchen other than a low-level prospect and perhaps some salary relief, which would give them enough headspace under the \$197 million competitive-

balance tax threshold to make call-ups and 40-man additions in September without fretting over every last dime.

They also would free up an outfield spot to evaluate Mac Williamson or even Chris Shaw while also ensuring that Austin Slater gets the longer look he deserves even when Hunter Pence gets his occasional start in left field.

Duggar need not worry. He is going to play a ton, regardless. For all the resemblance, the Giants must find out what they have in center field. So far, he is hitting .270. And he knows what to do with a hanging breaking ball.

There is health and consistency and so many other variables. Nothing is guaranteed. But what if the Giants finally drafted and developed a Finley analogue — one that has the whole prime of his career ahead of him?

Well, it just might break a long and damaging cycle. Because standing right over there, that's Diamondbacks center fielder A.J. Pollock, who will be a free agent in a few months. He'll also turn 31 in December.

Buster Posey will avoid the concussion list for now. One day after he was struck on the mask by a foul tip and later left the game with lightheadedness, Posey went through cardio and baseball activities and then passed concussion tests, Bochy said.

As long as no symptoms return Sunday morning, Bochy said he would start Posey at first base on Sunday.

The Giants brought up Triple-A catcher Ronny Freeman and put him on the taxi squad as a precaution. They also refreshed their bullpen by calling up right-handers Derek Law and Pierce Johnson while optioning infielder Kelby Tomlinson and right-hander Chris Stratton.

Stratton had taken Johnny Cueto's spot in the rotation, but Bochy did not see much confidence in the right-hander's outing Friday. The Giants can skip Stratton's next turn because of a day off on Wednesday. But given Suárez's recent struggles, and the fact that both Suárez and Dereck Rodríguez are about to hit their career high for innings in a pro season, it would behoove the Giants to give extra rest to their rotation whenever they can for the remainder of the season.

Stratton could be recalled in 10 days or even sooner if he were to replace an injured player, Bochy said.

ESPN.com

Position players pitching has gotten out of hand

Buster Olney

BOSTON -- The process through which position players appear on the mound is mostly the same. In the midst of a blowout, a manager or bench coach of the team getting crushed will approach a veteran player who is closer to the fringe of the roster than at its core. The player is asked if he can try to pitch an inning, to save the bullpen from some wear and tear.

Most accept the assignment with good humor, others with relish. When Pablo Sandoval pitched earlier this year, he *looked* like someone who had thrown some innings on the mound, showing off his athleticism with a turn of hips and a nice breaking ball. The Cubs' Anthony Rizzo had all but begged for the assignment, and had to assure manager Joe Maddon that he wouldn't overthrow -- and he kept his promise, retiring a batter with two pitches, one at 54 mph, the other at 63 mph. Jose Reyes was smiling at the outset of his mound appearance for the Mets last week. But in style and substance Reyes threw more like a batting-practice pitcher than an actual pitcher; after six runs and a 25-4 loss, his smile was mostly gone.

Through Friday's games, 39 position players have combined for 49 emergency appearances instances this season, a record-shattering total -- with eight weeks to play. (Shohei Ohtani is not included in those numbers, by the way.)

Calling on a position player to pitch is becoming standard operating procedure, almost commonplace. Which raises larger questions, such as: Should it be?

Should the Major League Baseball Players Association and the players go along with it, given how the sport got to this place? Or should the union push back on this practice and use it as leverage to get something else it wants?

The application of analytics is at the root of the position player-pitcher trend. Because of the data on the effectiveness of starting pitchers, most are asked to do less than ever before. Just get through the lineup a couple of times, and then turn it over to the bullpen. Or, on some days, the Tampa Bay Rays will start a reliever and follow with more relievers, a lot of the matchups scripted out before the first pitch.

Along the way, however, the whole plan can fall apart if one or two or three of the pitchers have a bad day, and that's when the manager is asking his position players if they can pitch. For example: Reyes pitched after Steven Matz failed to get out of the first inning, and the Mets' relievers who followed got pounded.

Generally speaking, the application of analytics has not been a good thing for the MLBPA. The starting pitchers, who have historically driven free-agent prices, have seen their preeminence increasingly diminished. The growing reliance on relief pitchers is pushing up the number of

free-agent relievers, and except for those at the top of each class, that's not a good thing. Through detailed study of value, teams are veering away from older players, like a lot of those who are being asked to pitch.

ADVERTISEMENT

But on those days when the numbers-based pitching plan falls apart, union members are being asked to bail out the organization. Should they?

It seems like an opportunity for the players' association to glean a concession. During the collective bargaining agreement talks a couple of years ago, MLB was prepared to add a 26th player to each roster -- but the union pushed back, believing that by adding a 26th man, it was only increasing the likelihood for specialized roles. Thus, the MLBPA walked away from the possibility of 30 extra jobs, and with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight, this seems like a mistake, because the specialized roles continue to grow regardless, with a lot of teams using daily minor league promotions to round out active rosters.

The evolving position-player-as-pitcher development could be one more issue among many through which the union seems to have some negotiating leverage, along with the growing problem of tanking teams, baseball's need for them to embrace pace-of-play initiatives and the possible addition of designated hitter to the National League, as clubs work to protect their pitchers from enhanced injury risk.

And the position player/pitcher thing is one more reason why the union should be in active discussions with MLB *right now*, to create a change from which the players can benefit as soon as possible.

News from around the major leagues

Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez is known as one of the most prepared and informed hitters, someone who studies and knows pitchers, and when he was asked whether he could think of someone with a cut fastball similar to the vicious, hard-veering cutter thrown by Nathan Eovaldi here Saturday, he hesitated.

"I want to say [Corey] Kluber," Martinez said, but then dismissed that comparison, because Kluber's cutter breaks downward. The cutter that Eovaldi threw against the Yankees, on the other hand, moved on a horizontal plane, sweeping at ridiculously high velocity. "Nasty," Martinez said, chuckling. "It's hard. What is it, 91, 92 [mph]?"

It was a conversation that might have been unexpected earlier in Eovaldi's career, when he was known for throwing one of the best fastballs in the game -- and one of the straightest fastballs.

Fast going into the plate, often faster going out. Eovaldi's great career challenge, beyond some devastating injuries, has been to create movement with his stuff.

And there Eovaldi was, dominating the Yankees for eight nearly pristine innings with his cutter. Aaron Boone's hitters had to be aware of and anticipate his 98-100 mph fastball -- and time and again, they were attacked by that cutter that moved like a Wiffle ball. Eovaldi threw the cutter inside to left-handed hitters, jamming Brett Gardner repeatedly, and on his final pitch, he aimed a cutter generally at the thigh of the right-handed-hitting Austin Romine, with the ball breaking perfectly across the inside corner for a called strike three. That inside cutter, Eovaldi said, is a variation of the pitch he has been working on.

He had started to throw his cutter in his last starts with the Yankees in 2016 and really liked the pitch, and as he went through a lost season of 2017 with the Rays, Eovaldi continued to be intrigued by the pitch. As he moved closer to his return with the Rays earlier this season, he altered his grip on the pitch in such a way that he could throw it harder -- greatly differentiating it from his slider, but also making it look more like his fastball. "His stuff is some of the best in the big leagues," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said after Saturday's game.

"Today, it was moving a little bit more than normal," Eovaldi acknowledged. "Why, I'm not really too sure.

"I feel like I'm still working on little things right now. But right now, with the fastball, the cutter, the slider has been pretty consistent. If I can keep working on that splitter -- once I feel like I get those pitches going, I'm going to have a lot more success."

- Cora was a valued utility player for most of his 14-year career, accumulating 140 games in a season only once, in 2003. You might think, then, that his philosophy of consistently resting players might be built on his experience as a part-time player. Instead, it's based on the change he saw in the sport after amphetamines were banned --- what he saw in the players' ability to bounce back day after day -- and what he saw watching Jose Altuve last year while Cora was the bench coach of the Houston Astros.

Altuve loves to play and plays ferociously, but Cora could see that sometimes he was a little run-down. The challenge in picking a day off for him was complicated by baseball's conventional wisdom that you should not take a hot hitter out of the lineup, because Altuve generates 200-plus hits annually and is almost always riding some kind of a streak.

Managing the Red Sox this year, Cora has put a priority on resting his regulars and trying to pick out spots when he can give Mookie Betts a 48-hour window of rest -- perhaps with a game off leading into an off day. Cora generally will not wait for a player's offensive surge to end to give him a day off, because he believes that in some respects, it's better to rest a hot player when

first signs of fatigue emerge, before the weariness manifests in his play and maybe a mechanical issue.

After having at least one day off this season, Betts is hitting .327 -- very Betts-like -- but with big power, six homers in 49 at-bats. It's a small sample size for Betts, but the larger sample size might be found in the team's play. Only two players appeared in at least 100 of the club's first 111 games, Andrew Benintendi and Martinez, and those two have been out of the lineup seven games apiece.

- Kevin Gausman made his debut for the Braves on Saturday, the first chapter since being traded from Baltimore to Atlanta. Evaluators have long felt that Gausman's stuff has been better than his game results, and as Gausman joined the Braves, they presented some ideas for him about pitch selection and mechanics. There is precedent for a talented Baltimore pitcher having success after leaving the Orioles: Jake Arrieta went to the Cubs and won a Cy Young Award in 2015.
 - Mike Scioscia ranks 18th all time among managers in victories, more than many Hall of Famers -- including Earl Weaver, Dick Williams and Scioscia's former manager, Tommy Lasorda. Scioscia's longstanding contract with the Angels expires at the end of this season, and if Scioscia decides to step away from managing -- as some friends expect -- he is likely to one day make a speech at Cooperstown. Scioscia's Angels won the World Series in 2002.
 - Roberto Osuna joins the Astros' roster Sunday, having completed his 75-game suspension under MLB's domestic violence policy. Some teams passed on Osuna because of the unknowns in his case, some teams passed because of the known and some teams were surprised the Astros would take on Osuna and his baggage because of his stuff. Some rival evaluators believe Osuna's stuff and performance ceiling is not really that much different than a lot of other relievers who were available in the market. But now he is with Houston, and the Astros will have to cope with whatever is to come, in his performance, and in any more details that emerge in his case. We'll see.
- And today will be better than yesterday.