



## **SF Giants Press Clips Monday, June 11, 2018**

### **San Francisco Chronicle**

#### **Giants' Brandon Crawford goes 4-for-4, dominates Max Scherzer and Nats**

**John Shea**

WASHINGTON — Brandon Crawford was no one-month wonder. He's not just Mr. May. He's Mr. First Half. His hitting proficiency wasn't a short-term spectacle.

He's more than that.

In the Giants' 2-0 victory over the Nationals on Sunday, Crawford showed that a hot bat can't always be stopped by a hot arm.

The Giants faced the National League's premier pitcher, Max Scherzer, who entered with a nine-game win streak, the most strikeouts in the majors and Pitcher of the Month honors for both April and May.

Along came Crawford, whose two-run homer was the decisive blow in the Giants' eighth win in 10 games. He became the first Giant with three hits off Scherzer in a game and finished with four of his team's five hits, raising his average since May 1 to .439.

"All home runs feel pretty good," Crawford said, "but against a guy like that who's been rolling all year, it feels great, obviously."

Crawford singled in his first at-bat, then homered and doubled. He had one more at-bat to try to get a cycle, as was the case May 19 against the Rockies when he struck out and said the cycle pursuit wore on him.

On Sunday, with Scherzer out of the game, Crawford hit a sharp liner down the left-field line off reliever Matt Grace. No triple, a mere double. No cycle.

“As soon as I hit it, I thought about it,” Crawford said. “But you’ve got to get it in the gap, really. Next time.”

This is nothing new. Yes, the man hit .189 through April, making his .338 season average even more astounding. Most of that came before Pablo Sandoval and Gregor Blanco told him April 27 about a mechanical flaw they had noticed, that he was holding his hands lower.

Crawford raised his hands a couple of inches in his load and homered that night against the Dodgers’ Hyun-Jin Ryu. He took his new/old mechanics into May and hit .412 (42-for-102).

One third of the way into June, he’s hitting .533 (16-for-30) for the month. His .439 since May 1 by far is the best in the majors. No. 2 on the list is Cincinnati’s Scooter Gennett at .378.

“It’s been impressive, to sustain the quality at-bats that he has for this long,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “It’s been fun to watch him the last six weeks. You see the numbers, and it’s hard to do against major-league pitching.”

Crawford’s homer was all the Giants needed. Derek Holland threw five innings of three-hit ball and Mark Melancon, Sam Dyson, Tony Watson and Hunter Strickland kept the shutout intact.

Strickland’s first batter was Bryce Harper, the first time they faced since last year’s wild brawl, which led to suspensions and the end of Michael Morse’s career. This time, Strickland got booed, and Harper bounced out to Crawford.

“Last year’s over, so I’ve got to get the out,” Strickland said. “Our team did a tremendous job all game. Crawford picked it up on the hitting side, and the (pitchers) went out and dealt and did their job, and I had to come in and do the same thing.”

Regarding the boos, Strickland said, “That’s expected. I don’t blame ’em.”

Crawford was his usual splendid self on defense, too. The Gold Glover nicely charged Trea Turner’s weak grounder to throw out the speedy leadoff hitter and wisely tagged Michael A. Taylor, who slid past second on a stolen-base attempt.

“I think he deserves more credit than he gets,” Holland said. “He’s not talked about as much as he should be. He’s backing it up defensively, and now he’s really doing a lot with the offense.”

Perhaps no one told Crawford’s story better than wife, Jalyne, who tweeted this after the homer: “Last nights chat: @bcraw35 “we are facing toughest pitcher in baseball!” Wifey: Me “he is facing the toughest hitter in baseball!” Whoop Whoop!!!!”

## **San Francisco Chronicle**

### **Giants' prospect Steven Duggar heats up with Sacramento, no rush to call him up**

**John Shea**

WASHINGTON — Steven Duggar has made some stunning defensive plays that created a social-media buzz, and his hitting is progressing nicely.

Still, there's no rush for the Giants to call up the speedy center fielder.

"It's a challenge," said general manager Bobby Evans, noting that Duggar isn't on the 40-man roster, Mac Williamson is the only outfielder on the big-league roster with options and Gorkys Hernandez has played himself into a bigger role.

"It's not easy to bring him up and test the waters with him. We want Duggar to put pressure on us. It'll take not only him putting pressure on us but the opportunity being here. The more pressure he puts on us, the better for him."

In Duggar's past 10 games with Triple-A Sacramento, he has hit .432 (19-for-44) while raising his season average from .254 to .288. However, though he hit safely in all 10 games, he struck out 12 times in that stretch, which is a concern.

Hernandez was out of Sunday's lineup a day after getting plunked in the ribs. The outfield was Hunter Pence in left, Austin Jackson in center and Williamson in right. Andrew McCutchen, hitting .345 in his past 14 games, with three homers in the past week, lined out as a pinch-hitter in the ninth.

With outfield prospects Austin Slater (hitting .366) and Chris Shaw joining Duggar in Sacramento, along with Gregor Blanco, who recently was outrighted, the Giants have plenty of depth.

"It's a nice problem when you have depth," manager Bruce Bochy said. "It gives us some pretty good options."

Alen Hanson, hitting .344 in 22 games since arriving from Sacramento, has played mostly infield but is another outfield option.

"He could be out there, too," Bochy said. "It's a little crowded out there right now, but the way he's playing, it's hard not to find a spot. But at the same time, it's pretty nice having that weapon coming off the bench."

Briefly: Pablo Sandoval drew two walks and scored on Brandon Crawford's two-run homer. It was Sandoval's first multiple-walk game since Aug. 12, 2015. ... Brandon Belt (appendicitis) will begin taking swings Monday in Arizona. ... Johnny Cueto (elbow) and Jeff Samardzija

(shoulder) will throw off a mound before Monday's series opener in Miami, with each targeted for 40 pitches. ... Madison Bumgarner, who'll start the opener, was given the option to take an early flight to Florida but chose to stay and fly with the team.

**MLB.com**

**Crawford makes ASG case with HR vs. Scherzer**

**Chris Haft**

WASHINGTON -- The Giants knew that they had to face Max Scherzer. Ultimately, however, the Nationals confronted a more formidable opponent by having to oppose Brandon Crawford.

The Giants' shortstop, not the Nationals' pitching ace, loomed over the series finale at Nationals Park as if he were another D.C. monument. Crawford went 4-for-4, including a fourth-inning home run off Scherzer, to account for the scoring in San Francisco's 2-0 triumph.

"It was like he knew he had to be good. He stepped up," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said of Crawford, who was an All-Star in 2015 and is bidding to return to D.C. when the 2018 All-Star Game is played there next month.

The outcome gave San Francisco a 2-1 series victory over the National League East leaders and halted seven years of frustration here for the Giants, who entered this series having lost 17 of 22 games at Washington since the start of the 2011 season.

The Giants ended Scherzer's nine-decision winning streak. But they did nothing to overwhelm Scherzer (10-2) himself. He pitched almost flawlessly -- unless he was facing Crawford. The winner of the NL's past two Cy Young Awards yielded four hits in seven innings while walking three and striking out nine. But Crawford collected three of the hits off Scherzer, including a fourth-inning drive over the right-field barrier that followed Pablo Sandoval's leadoff walk.

Crawford said that Scherzer threw him the gamut of his deliveries, from fastballs to offspeed pitches, until he connected with a 2-2 slider. "I just tried to shorten up and see the ball over the plate," said Crawford, who has eight home runs.

Scherzer spoke with humility about facing Crawford. "I threw good pitches to him," Scherzer said. "He put great swings on them. He wins. I lose. It's as simple as that. He's hot. I have to be better than him. Today he was great. And tip your hat and move on."

Facing Nationals reliever Matt Grace in the eighth inning, Crawford lashed his final hit, a double. The ball eluded Washington left fielder Juan Soto long enough to cause observers to wonder whether Crawford should have dashed toward third base in an attempt to record a cycle.

Said Crawford, "Right when I hit it I was thinking about it, and I was running hard out of the box, and then I saw it curving pretty hard, so I thought it was going to go foul. I slowed up for a

second -- which might have cost me a shot at the cycle. But I was a little disappointed in myself when I saw it bounce by him."

Crawford, who recorded his sixth career effort featuring four or more hits, also became the first Giant to amass at least three hits off Scherzer in a game. Moreover, Crawford joined Cincinnati's Scooter Gennett and Miami's Martin Prado as the only players to collect three or more hits off Scherzer in a game this season.

The Giants' pitching also contributed significantly. Starter Derek Holland surrendered three hits in five innings before relievers Mark Melancon, Sam Dyson, Tony Watson and Hunter Strickland each worked an inning apiece.

"I knew coming into the game that I couldn't make any mistakes," said Holland (4-6).

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

This game's ninth inning marked the first time that Strickland and Washington megastar Bryce Harper faced each other since their AT&T Park altercation on May 29, 2017. This time, Strickland never came close to throwing at Harper, who grounded out to Crawford.

"The past is the past," Strickland said. "I think everybody's moved on from that. That's part of our job, to get whoever it is out. No matter if it's him or [Matt] Adams, they're all good hitters."

#### SOUND SMART

Sandoval, starting at first base, drew a pair of walks. That marked the first time he coaxed multiple walks in one game since Aug. 12, 2015, when he was in his first year with the Red Sox.

#### UP NEXT

Like Washington, the previous stop on their three-city trip, the Giants haven't fared too well at Miami, posting a 3-6 record there in the previous three years. Madison Bumgarner will get the first crack at reversing this trend, which should raise the Giants' hopes. However, Bumgarner has recorded only three quality starts in his seven previous outings against the Marlins. Miami will counter with left-hander Wei-Yin Chen, who's 1-3 with a 5.86 ERA.

#### **MLB.com**

#### **Posey, Hundley form a potent offensive pair Chris Haft**

WASHINGTON -- Giants catchers Buster Posey and Nick Hundley have formed one of the most productive offensive partnerships at any position in the Major Leagues.

Entering Sunday's series finale against the Washington Nationals, Posey and Hundley had combined to hit .289, best in the bigs from the catching spot. They also ranked among NL leaders in on-base percentage (.347, fourth), slugging percentage (.466, second), OPS (.813, second) and RBIs (36, tied for second).

Any group of players including Posey, a four-time Silver Slugger Award winner and a five-time All-Star, is bound to rank highly. In this case, Hundley's influence on the hitting statistics is undeniable, given the division of labor. Hundley has started 22 games behind the plate, a significant number even when compared with Posey's 43.

"I think more than anything, we have a guy [Hundley] who was a regular catcher in the Major Leagues and has benefited from being in this role a couple of times," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said.

#### Player Updates

- Bochy said that first baseman Brandon Belt, who's recovering from appendicitis, will start swinging a bat Monday. Belt hasn't played since June 1.
- Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija are expected to throw 40 pitches apiece in their respective bullpen sessions Monday in Miami.
- Bochy said that Alen Hanson will begin taking fielding practice in the outfield to build depth at the position. Hanson played two innings in the outfield for the Giants earlier this season and started 23 games as an outfielder last year for the White Sox -- five in left, six in center and 12 in right.
- Center fielder Gorkys Hernandez was out of Sunday's lineup, feeling sore after being struck in his left rib cage by a pitch on Saturday. Bochy said that Hernandez would be available to pinch hit.

#### **NBC Sports Bay Area**

#### **Posey, Crawford leading in first round of All-Star voting**

#### **Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO -- Fans across the country have noticed Brandon Crawford's ridiculous hot streak.

Crawford, hitting .439 since May 1, was well ahead of the field when the first round of All-Star voting results were released Monday morning. With 466,021 votes, he's more than doubling the total of Dansby Swanson. Addison Russell and Trea Turner are also far behind of Crawford, who is batting .338 and seeking to make his second All-Star team.

The Giants have one other player in position to start, but that's a closer race. Buster Posey (281,331) is edging Willson Contreras (259,427) of the Cubs through one round of voting. Kurt Suzuki of the Braves is also within 60,000 votes of Posey.

Braves fans have clearly responded to their team's surprising start. Freddie Freeman leads all players with 633,342 votes, with Brandon Belt a distant third at first base. Ozzie Albies is the

leading vote getter at second base; Joe Panik is fifth. Nolan Arenado would round out the infield if the game were played today.

Bryce Harper, who will host the game at Nationals Park, Nick Markakis, and Matt Kemp lead the field of outfielders. The Giants do not have an outfielder in the top 15.

The next round of results will be released Monday, June 18th.

### **NBC Sports Bay Area**

#### **No drama as Strickland, Harper square off for first time since fight**

**Alex Pavlovic**

WASHINGTON D.C. -- Hunter Pence's RBI single in the seventh inning on Friday was a sneaky big moment if you're a fan of drama. The run gave the Giants a 9-5 lead, which meant Hunter Strickland was left in the bullpen in the ninth inning, when Bryce Harper was due up third. There was no avoiding a confrontation on Sunday.

Harper led off the top of the ninth at Nationals Park, and Strickland came in with a two-run lead. A little over a year after they came to blows in the middle of AT&T Park, Harper grounded Strickland's third pitch up the middle for the first out of a 1-2-3 ninth.

"Last year is over. I've just got to get the out," Strickland said. "The past is the past. Everybody has moved on and that's part of the job, to get whoever is up there out."

Well, not everybody has moved on. Much of Sunday's crowd departed before the ninth, fearful that a storm was on the way. But those who remained showered Strickland with loud boos as he warmed up. The boos were not as loud, however, as they were when Strickland and the Giants played here last August.

"That's expected," Strickland said, smiling. "I don't blame them."

The matchup never came close to turning dramatic. The first pitch was an 89 mph slider that was up, and Harper fouled it back. Two pitches later, he was headed back to the dugout. Harper did not look back at Strickland and Strickland did not look back at Harper. He returned to the mound and clinched his 13th save, capping off a big day for the bullpen.

Mark Melancon pitched a scoreless sixth against his former team. Sam Dyson breezed through the seventh. Tony Watson struck out one in the eighth. The four relievers combined for four hitless innings and struck out three, continuing a trend. Since Will Smith and Melancon returned, this bullpen has turned into one of the National League's strongest.

"Those guys are tremendous and they're going a great job," Strickland said. "Everybody all year has been doing their part, but to get those guys back, with that kind of experience, is always clutch."

## NBC Sports Bay Area

### Crawford playing like an MVP candidate: 'He's not talked about enough'

Alex Pavlovic

WASHINGTON D.C. — There was a time early in his career when Brandon Crawford was all too aware of the number .250. He batted .248 in his second full season, .248 the next year, and .246 the year after that.

Hitting .250 is not what Crawford grew up dreaming of, but in a sport built on numbers, it's an early milestone. From there, you can think of batting .275 as a big leaguer, or perhaps .300. Crawford, now in his eighth big league season, is skipping a lot of steps in the middle. With one of the hottest stretches in franchise history, he's up to .338, and a legitimate contender for the batting title a season after batting .253.

Crawford said he is not thinking about a batting title or individual accolades. "It's June," he pointed out, smiling. But when a player is going this hot, and when his team is on the kind of run that should keep it in contention, you can start to look at the big picture.

After Crawford had four hits, three off of Max Scherzer, and provided the only runs in a 2-0 win over the Nationals, here's where the paint has dried: The Giants have a shortstop who is a lock to return here for the All-Star game next month, a threat in the race for the batting title, and a legitimate MVP candidate as the season approaches the halfway point.

"I think he deserves more credit than he gets," said Derek Holland, Sunday's winning pitcher. "He's not talked about enough."

There were a couple of players on the other side Sunday who annually get MVP attention and have been mentioned plenty already this season by the national media. Scherzer entered as the National League's leader with 3.9 Wins Above Replacement, and he bolstered his resume by striking out nine over seven strong innings. Bryce Harper is a former MVP and annual candidate, and he hit his 19th homer during this series.

But it is Crawford, not Harper — his former Fall League teammate — who finds himself near the top of the WAR lists that are so popular come voting time. Crawford entered play Sunday at 2.0 Wins Above Replacement, 10th in the National League, and he'll wake up a couple ticks higher after a homer, two doubles and a single. He nudged his WRC+ to 150, which ranks him sixth in the league. Throw in his Gold Glove and you have one of the best players in the National League.

This is where Crawford would tell you to take a deep breath. He is famous for rarely showing emotion on the field, and he wasn't about to give anything away when asked about a scorching stretch that has reached six weeks. Since May 1, Crawford is batting .439 with 16 doubles, six homers and 27 RBI, but ...



"A cliché is a cliché for a reason," he said. "It's something I've at least always tried to do and done a decent job of, take every game one game at a time, whether it's last year and we're coming to the park late in the year and getting close to 100 losses, or this year, playing better. Every day is a new day."

This day, the Giants admitted, was easy to pencil as a loss. Scherzer is the best pitcher in the league and struck out six straight at one point. He was facing a pitcher, Holland, who entered with a 4.91 ERA. But Crawford smacked a hanging cutter and Holland and a strong bullpen made the shot hold up.

"It's like he knew he had to be good," Bochy said of Holland, "And he stepped up."

Holland agreed with that, but only to a point. He gave all due respect to Scherzer, but then chastised himself for failing to go deeper in the game. Five shutout innings ended up being plenty.

"I've got to go out and do my job," Holland said. "Anybody can beat anybody on any given day."

That's become a daily routine for Crawford. He took Gerrit Cole, an AL Cy Young contender, deep in May. On Sunday he repeatedly put Scherzer in his book, becoming the first Giant to get three hits off the hard-throwing right-hander. Crawford faced Matt Grace in the eighth, needing only a triple for the cycle. He smoked a double down the line that tapped the chalk and then briefly spun away from Juan Soto. It was then that Crawford made his only mistake of a day that otherwise could serve as a bullet point for an MVP case.

"Right when I hit it I was thinking about (a triple) and I was running hard out of the box," Crawford said. "I saw it curve and I was thinking it was going foul, so I slowed up a little, which might have cost me. I was a little disappointed (in myself) when I saw it got by him."

As Crawford stood on second and stared in at the dugout, the scoreboard whirred. That average that once chased .250 climbed up to .338. Only Matt Kemp (.351), Scooter Gennett (.342) and Freddie Freeman (.340) have been better.

"It's been impressive, to sustain the quality of at-bat that he has for this long," manager Bruce Bochy said. "He's in one of those zones that good athletes get in and you ride it out. It's been a long ride."

## **NBC Sports Bay Area**

### **Crawford homer the difference as Giants take series from Scherzer, Nats**

**Alec Pavlovic**

WASHINGTON D.C. — The Nationals held their annual fundraising gala on Saturday night, so Sunday's game was pushed back to a rare 4:05 p.m. start so their players would be in, uhh,

better shape. Derek Holland and Brandon Crawford left them with a wicked hangover.

Holland pitched five shutout innings opposite the league's best starter, Max Scherzer, and Crawford took him deep in the fourth as part of a four-hit day. The Giants got a tidy 2-0 win and shot out of town before the rain came. They started this 10-game road trip with a strong series victory. Here are the details...

--- Crawford joined Scooter Gennett and Martin Prado as the only players this season to have three hits in a game off Scherzer. Gennett is one of the players Crawford is chasing in the batting race. He finished Sunday's game at .338, which puts him right there with Gennett and Freddie Freeman behind NL leader Matt Kemp (.351). Crawford needed a triple for the cycle when he came up in the eighth. He doubled down the left field line for his fourth hit.

--- Holland had it all working in five shutout innings. He got five swinging strikes on his slider, three each on his fastball and curve, and two on his changeup. Holland allowed just three hits, walked two, and struck out four.

--- Scherzer was his usual self, striking out nine in seven innings. He struck out six straight Giants at one point and did so on just 26 pitches. But he hung a two-strike cutter to Crawford and that was all it took.

--- Hunter Strickland and Bryce Harper faced off to open the ninth. There was no drama. On Strickland's third pitch, Harper grounded out softly to Crawford. Strickland picked up his 13th save.

## **The Athletic**

### **Giants Analytics: What to watch for in returns of Bumgarner, Panik, Pence, Melancon and the rest**

**Owen Piondexter**

For much of the season so far, the refrain for Giants fans was, if we can just hang on until everyone comes back ...

Well, now they're back. The Giants can nearly field an entire team with players who have just come back from injury within the last two weeks. Let's take a look at each one and the key stats to watch in their return to action.

Madison Bumgarner: Key stat: K-BB%, swinging strike rate

Strikeout minus walk percent is one of the best predictors of future performance, and last year Bumgarner's was under 20 percent for the first time since 2013.

The issue with that was not the walks, which have stayed between 4-6 percent for most of his career, but the strikeouts, which dipped down to 22.4 percent from 25-27.5 percent the previous three years. This was tied to a corresponding drop in swinging strike rate, which was

down a notch to 10.2 percent. The issue was a low whiff rate on both his fastball and changeup.

Here are his swinging strike rates on each pitch since 2015.

His fastball — the black line — has been on a steady, if subtle, downward trend, while the changeup has bounced around in its effectiveness. This was counteracted last year by his curveball becoming more of a weapon. At his best, Bumgarner — who made his season debut with a solid start on Wednesday — gets lots of swings and misses on the high fastball. He was still a very good pitcher last year, but he'll need the four-seamer or the cutter to perform a little better to get back to elite.

Mark Melancon: HR/FB%, BABIP

Melancon's velocity is down a tick from last year, but I expect that will rise back up, and even if he's throwing 91 instead of 92, he can still be an effective pitcher. The bigger question is on batted balls.

Last year, Melancon's ERA/FIP/xFIP was 4.50/3.22/3.35 and the discrepancy between ERA and its more predictive cousins suggests some bad luck on ground balls going for hits and fly balls leaving the park. Sure enough, in the 30 innings he threw in 2017, he gave up a BABIP of .387, nearly 100 points higher than his career average, and a HR/FB% of 12.5 percent, compared to 8.9 percent for his career. He wasn't giving up harder hit balls in 2017, just worse results.

The high ERA looks like a bit of a small sample size fluke. Now — after making his season debut on June 1 — he just has to prove it with some better results this year.

Hunter Pence: AVG, SLG

Hunter Pence saw his production dip in 2017, and then fall off a cliff at the start of this year. Now back with the benefit of rest — he returned to the active roster on June 2 — and a supposedly retooled swing, it's time to see what Pence can contribute.

He's not going to suddenly get faster or become more than a passable defender, so the real questions are around contact and power. His 2017 ISO (SLG-AVG) of .126 was a career low and this year his power has been essentially non-existent — he has no homers, no triples and two doubles among 14 hits, which adds up to an ISO of .028. His .197 average on a can't-blame-luck .304 BABIP also doesn't inspire confidence. The low average is driven by a high swinging strike rate of 17.7 percent, which has caused Pence to strike out a third of the time this season.

That is now all prologue to his midseason comeback attempt. In 16 plate appearances since returning, he's been better, though it's too early to say he's back. With the Giants' glut of outfielders, Pence will have to earn playing time. That would mean putting the bat on the ball more often, with more authority, or, most likely, some combination of the two. It's unlikely he's as terrible as he was to start the year, but it's very likely that age is having its natural effects on him, as it does to us all. The burden of proof is on Pence to show he can still help his team win games.

Joe Panik: whiff rate, BABIP

For the other returning veterans, the question is: do they still have it? Joe Panik still has it. The only question is if he has something more. At the start of the year, when the Giants somehow split a four-game series against the Dodgers while only scoring on Panik solo home runs, there was talk that Panik was joining the many swing changers, elevating the ball more, and hitting more long shots as a result.

In fact, Panik — who returned from the disabled list on June 1 — has gone in the opposite direction, heightening his already excellent contact skills at the expense of a little power. His 3.1 swinging strike rate is lowest in all of baseball among players with at least 100 plate appearances, a full percentage point below second place Brett Gardner. Panik (5.7 percent) and Andrelton Simmons (4.1 percent) are the only players with K% below 8 percent. Panik's batting average has been suppressed by a low BABIP, but that should rise. Statcast's estimators think his average should be over .300 instead of its current .258.

As for his power, Panik hasn't hit for extra bases at his normal rate, but it's likely enough that some of his singles will find gaps here and there, and he'll launch the occasional home run. While his exit velocity is at career norms, his launch angle has been low this year, and he's only hit one home run since the opening series. Though the talk at the start of the year was around Panik adding power to his high contact profile, he may instead simply add more contact. If he can keep that up while the BABIP rebounds, he's in for a great season, regardless of what happens with his power.

Mac Williamson, Alen Hanson: exit velocity, launch angle

Both of these players spent a couple of weeks as unexpected stars. Mac Williamson had a little prospect hype going into the year, but Alen Hanson truly came out of nowhere. Both obliterated Triple-A pitching, and then kept up the act after getting the call to the majors. Williamson has ridden a 27% HR/FB to a .266/.329/.469 line, and Hanson's .348 BABIP has produced an even better .344/.379/.721.

Both are obviously talented, but from exit velocity and launch angle, it seems unlikely they can keep this up. Their exit velocities are both in the high 80s — fine but not special — and neither has shown a particular proclivity to lift the ball. Hanson's average launch angle of 12.1 degrees is around league average, and Williamson somehow has an average launch angle of 1.0 degrees. I'm guessing something weird is going on with Statcast there, but either way, we can gift him another 10 degrees and he still doesn't look like a power hitter.

All that said, both have earned the right to try and show that the batting line and not the Statcast metrics are closer to reality. Hanson has become one of those players who makes me stop what I'm doing and watch every time he comes to the plate. Given his ability to play in the infield and the outfield, here's hoping the Giants find enough plate appearances to figure out just what they have with this exciting young player.

## **The Athletic**

### **Brandon Crawford remains red-hot at the plate — even against Max Scherzer Julian McWilliams**

WASHINGTON — The Giants looked like they were bound to lose this series against the Washington Nationals after Saturday's 7-5 loss. Max Scherzer was going Sunday. The Scherzer who had a league-leading 10 wins. The Scherzer who was third in the majors in ERA (1.95) behind Justin Verlander and Jacob deGrom. The Scherzer who fanned 133 batters to also lead the league. The Giants had Derek Holland on the hill, and the Nationals had Scherzer.

Usually, that's not a contest.

At one point, it looked as though that was the case Sunday. Scherzer fanned six in a row before a Buster Posey groundout in the third inning. He was working quickly, dominating with a mix of four pitches, including a 97 mph fastball with movement.

But there was one hiccup: Brandon Crawford.

Crawford's been on a run. He's the hottest hitter in baseball. He hit a two-run homer Sunday off a slider that Scherzer left over the plate in the fourth inning, the deciding factor in a 2-0 Giants win. It was Scherzer's only mistake of the day. Crawford's now hitting .439 with six homers since the start of May. In June, he's hitting .539.

This wasn't supposed to be a contest.

But Crawford has been just as dominant as Scherzer during this run of his.

"All home runs feel pretty good," Crawford said after the game. "But against a guy like that who's been rolling all year, it feels great, obviously. He's a tough at-bat. He has four plus pitches to get you out with, you just kind of try to shorten up and see the ball over the plate.

"It's been impressive," manager Bruce Bochy said of Crawford's streak. "It really has. To sustain the quality at-bats that he has for this long. Yesterday, I gave him a day (off) because we've been grinding him. It's going to be important to take care of these guys, he's one of them."

Crawford finished the day 4 for 4 and shot his first hit through the right side on a fastball that Scherzer hung a bit over the plate:

Scherzer's never going to be afraid to throw his fastball. He threw it 62 times on the day. So he challenged Crawford again in his next at-bat with a fastball in the zone (which I'm surprised he didn't swing at):

Next, Scherzer got Crawford swinging on a curveball, which had some devastating break to it that Crawford is just ahead of:

At this point, Scherzer goes to the changeup. Keep in mind, Crawford is locked in, so Scherzer knows he has to be careful:

The next pitch is an example of how well Crawford is seeing the ball. The fact that he could get to this pitch just shows how locked in he is. It's been widely noted that Scherzer has a ridiculous spin rate. The higher the spin, the more likely a pitcher will have success higher in the zone. This pitch Scherzer dialed in at 95 mph, but Crawford just casually fought it off:

So, let's rewind. So far in this at-bat he's seen the fastball, curveball, changeup and again the fastball. Scherzer's basically used all his weapons. Crawford's shown he could hit the fastball. It's a pitch Crawford obviously still respects, but Scherzer — on this day — can't get it by him when it matters.

So, what does Scherzer do? He tips his hat to Crawford, essentially, saying that if I'm going to beat you it's going to be with an offspeed pitch, not my fastball.

He goes back to the changeup for a ball (which is nasty, by the way):

And then the slider, a pitch he'd been saving in his back pocket. But look how much of the plate it gets and Crawford turns on it:

"You got to stay on his fastball," Crawford said. "He runs it up to 97, so you have to kind of stay on that and make adjustments. He has such good movement that you really have to focus on seeing the plate and trying to find a good pitch to hit."

There was a time when the left-handed-hitting shortstop was known more for his leather than his bat. At 31, it seems as if he's starting to hit his stride where he can really be known for both.

"Sure, I think he's shown that he's a good hitter," Bochy said. "This guys made such progress going back to when he first came up. But being an experienced veteran now, he's not content. He's so focused up there. That's what you love about him."

Crawford will come back to earth. Staying at this rate over the course of the season is nearly impossible, but in that at-bat alone you see an advanced approach with a pitcher that has an advanced approach of his own.

The more pitches you can eliminate (and what I mean by eliminate is prove you can hit them), the more confident you can be that the pitcher won't try that pitch again. Though Crawford said he respected Scherzer's fastball and stayed honest on it, it's easier to adjust to an off-speed pitch since the speed is significantly slower.

Holland deserves credit, too, after he went five innings without allowing a run on just three hits. He didn't necessarily win the pitchers' duel against Scherzer, but he didn't make the

mistakes against a tough Nationals lineup.

“It’s huge (to do it against Scherzer),” Holland said. “I knew going into the game I couldn’t make any mistakes.”

Scherzer made one, and it was to Crawford.

Story from the diamond

As Bochy held his pregame presser, he motioned for the media to look just outside the dugout toward the VIP field level section. “You see that guy right there,” Bochy said with a smirk. “That was my high school teammate.”

“He (Bochy) went the baseball route!” Bochy’s old teammate shouted into the dugout with his light blonde hair that looked as if he’d just come from a Kiss concert. “I went to Vietnam!”