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San Francisco Chronicle

**Giants win 4th straight behind Madison Bumgarner's arm, bat
Henry Schulman**

PHOENIX — Madison Bumgarner had just finished his regular postgame Q&A when he walked past reporters and said, half-jokingly, "I can't believe you didn't ask me about the balk."

Yes, Bumgarner committed a balk Thursday night, and it was still on his mind even though the real story of an 8-1 Giants victory was Bumgarner doing Bumgarner things to beat one of the majors' hottest pitchers on a not-so-hot day for the organization.

Johnny Cueto had Tommy John surgery. The Giants learned infielder Pablo Sandoval will have a season-ending hamstring operation. With that as the backdrop, the Giants played one of their best all-around games of the year and won their fourth in a row.

Bumgarner put 10 runners on base in five innings, but he stranded nine of them. He outpitched Zack Greinke, who was named National League Pitcher of the Month for July hours earlier.

Moreover, Bumgarner lined a two-out single to left in the fifth to bring Austin Slater home with the go-ahead run, leading to Greinke's first loss since June 13.

"It was a grind," Bumgarner said. "It was one of those games when your back's against the wall the whole time out there. Obviously, that's not the way I like to draw it up, working so hard. At the same time, those are the types of games that are gratifying, keeping your team in it."

Hunter Pence gave the Giants a 3-1 lead with a sacrifice fly in the seventh and the Giants finally used the eighth inning to put away a game, rather than letting the other team sneak back into it. They scored five runs.

That largess allowed manager Bruce Bochy to rest relievers Reyes Moronta and Tony Watson.

Mark Melancon pitched a scoreless sixth and rookie reliever Ray Black accomplished something in the seventh that he was not aware of until friends texted him after the game.

When he struck out A.J. Pollock, Black completed the equivalent of a nine-inning no-hitter dating to a July 10 outing. Black kept the “no-no” going when he got Steven Souza Jr. to pop out.

Black struck out Paul Goldschmidt with a 99 mph fastball and Pollock with an 84 mph slider.

When asked about his approach to Goldschmidt, Black supplied a two-word answer.

“Challenge him,” he said. “He’s a great hitter. When a guy like that steps into the box, you can’t be too timid.”

Evan Longoria gave the Giants a 1-0 lead when he homered off Greinke in the top of the first, then saved two runs in the bottom half of the inning with his best catch with the Giants. He laid out with full extension to grab a bases-loaded liner by Souza.

Slater made some big contributions. He doubled and scored on Bumgarner’s single, totaled three runs and hit a two-run single in the five-run eighth.

With Sandoval done for the season, Slater will play a lot of first base until Brandon Belt returns.

Injuries have forced the Giants to become a melding of young and old now, with players like Slater, Steven Duggar, Alen Hanson, Dereck Rodriguez, Moronta and Andrew Suarez playing alongside old pros like Bumgarner, Longoria, Pence and Buster Posey.

“Those guys have been there and done great things in the game and they’re still producing,” Slater said. “We’re going to try to learn from those guys and bring some energy and excitement.”

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants' Pablo Sandoval out for the season with hamstring tear
Henry Schulman

PHOENIX — Part of Giants manager Bruce Bochy's job is providing medical updates to the media. He usually speaks matter-of-factly because he understands that injuries are part of the game. For the 2018 Giants, they have been a big part.

There was nothing mundane about Bochy's tone Thursday when he delivered the surprising news that infielder Pablo Sandoval will miss the rest of the season with a torn right hamstring, which occurred as he slid home on a sacrifice fly against the Brewers on Sunday.

Sandoval is expected to undergo surgery next week to repair a significant tear near the top of the hamstring.

Bochy loves Sandoval, for the way he plays and how he comports himself in the clubhouse and leads younger players. Sandoval, who turns 32 next week, adapted to his new role as a backup with grace and humor.

"They all hurt, but Pablo was so reliable, all the roles that he had," Bochy said, noting how Sandoval replaced Evan Longoria at third base and Brandon Belt at first during their respective injuries, started two games at second base, caught bullpens as the emergency catcher and even pitched an inning.

"It's not just that he played there, but the job he did," Bochy said. "The guy did everything. This is a tough one to overcome."

Sandoval got hurt while scoring on a Steven Duggar sacrifice fly that followed Sandoval's two-run, standup triple. Both plays helped the Giants beat Milwaukee 8-5.

Bochy said he asked the medical staff if Sandoval hurt himself running out the triple and was told he did not.

Sandoval did not think the injury was serious. He even joked that he did not want to miss any games because, he said as he pointed toward the dugout bench, "This is where I'll be when Belt gets back."

Sandoval's MRI exam Monday was not expected to yield significantly bad news.

“It really shocked me,” Bochy said. “When he slid home, I never thought the hamstring was going to put him out for two months. It’s a pretty good tear.”

Sandoval hit .248 with nine homers and a .727 OPS. He also played well at third and first base.

Sandoval was in his first full season back with the Giants. The 2012 World Series Most Valuable Player left after the 2014 World Series to sign a five-year, \$95 million contract with the Red Sox, who released him last year.

Boston is paying all but \$545,000 of Sandoval’s salary this year. The Giants have the option to bring him back in 2019 at a similar price, which almost certainly will happen.

Sandoval’s locker mate, Johnny Cueto, successfully underwent Tommy John elbow surgery in Los Angeles. Dr. Neal ElAttrache performed the operation and said Cueto will be out 12 to 14 months, leaving a slim possibility that Cueto can return late next season.

“It would be nice,” Bochy said, “but you know Tommy John rehab. It’s different for everybody.”

San Jose Mercury News

Giants shocked by Sandoval’s season-ending injury, forced to adjust infield depth

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—Pablo Sandoval walked into the Giants clubhouse Sunday hoping he might be able to avoid a stint on the disabled list.

But his optimism was short-lived and his injury is much worse than expected. Sandoval is now out for the season and will require surgery to heal a torn right hamstring.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy announced the news before Thursday’s series-opener in Arizona, where the Giants will play the first-place D’backs.

“It shocks me,” Bochy said. “I guess when he slid into home is when he did it. You never think a hamstring is going to put him out over two months but if it’s this bad of a tear, it needs surgery.”

Sandoval suffered the hamstring injury sliding into home plate July 29 against the Brewers. He legged out a triple to reach third base and then scored on a sacrifice fly, but Bochy said Sandoval didn’t feel pain until executing his slide into the plate.

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Sandoval hit .248 with nine home runs and 40 RBIs for the Giants this season as a key presence off the bench. Though Sandoval began the season as a bench player, he worked his way into the starting lineup as a replacement for first baseman Brandon Belt and third baseman Evan Longoria who both missed time due to injuries this season.

“They all hurt, but Pablo was so valuable in all the roles that he had this season,” Bochy said. “We lost Belt, he played first. Longo goes down, he played third. Not just play them, but do a really nice job defensively. He was a big part of this offense.”

The Giants signed Sandoval last July after he was designated for assignment halfway through his five-year contract with the Boston Red Sox. He hit just .225 for San Francisco last year, but made the club out of spring training this season and was lauded by Bochy and teammates for his willingness to fill any role and positive influence in the Giants clubhouse.

Sandoval also appeared at second base and as a pitcher this season, debuting on the mound with a scoreless inning against the Dodgers April 28. Bochy expressed hope in July he could find a way for Sandoval to play all nine positions in a game, but one of the team’s most versatile players won’t have the chance to try that until 2019.

“We say so many times, the energy that he brings, you miss that,” Bochy said. “We’re going to miss that. But he’ll be around once he gets through this surgery and he’ll be down pulling for the boys.”

Sandoval was the primary backup at both corner infield positions, but the Giants have several options at both positions. Belt will miss the next eight-to-10 days as he continues to recover from a hyperextended knee, so rookie Austin Slater will start his third consecutive game at first base.

Bochy said catcher Buster Posey could also play some first during Belt’s absence, while utility player Chase d’Arnaud could fill in if necessary.

With Sandoval out, d’Arnaud, Alen Hanson and Kelby Tomlinson can all provide coverage behind Longoria at third base. The Giants may also consider promoting Ryder Jones from Triple-A as Jones is hitting .288 for the Sacramento River Cats.

Injury updates

Right-hander Johnny Cueto had season-ending Tommy John surgery Thursday and is expected to miss most if not all of the 2019 season.

Bochy said the Giants anticipate Cueto's recovery will take between 12-to-14 months and the team is unsure if he'll be able to pitch next season.

With Cueto and Sandoval out for the year, the Giants can eventually place both players on the 60-day disabled list to clear 40-man roster spots. The team will need space for right-handed reliever Hunter Strickland, who threw to hitters at the Giants' minor league complex for the first time since fracturing his hand in June.

Bochy said Strickland threw 20 pitches and the Giants are optimistic Strickland will be ready to return from the disabled list when he's eligible August 18.

San Jose Mercury News

Bumgarner beats Greinke in battle of aces, Giants knock D'backs out of first place

Kerry Crowley

PHOENIX—After announcing right-hander Johnny Cueto would undergo season-ending Tommy John surgery on the first of the month, the Giants thought they had nowhere to go but up in August.

They were wrong.

Hours before the Giants blasted the D'backs 8-1, manager Bruce Bochy announced Pablo Sandoval's hamstring injury was more severe than the club anticipated. Sandoval tore his right hamstring Sunday and like Cueto, will require surgery that will sideline him for the remainder of the year.

With the news of Cueto and Sandoval's injuries in the rearview mirror, it was up to Madison Bumgarner to step on the gas pedal and lead the Giants past a club that began the day tied for the National League West lead. He obliged, and in a five-run eighth inning, the Giants' offense slammed on that pedal.

In a battle of aces and a matchup of two of the more talented hitting pitchers in baseball, Bumgarner bested D'backs right-hander Zack Greinke, who earned National League Pitcher of the Month honors for his July efforts earlier in the day.

Though Bumgarner has struggled through an uncharacteristically quiet year at the plate, his go-ahead single against Greinke produced the sound the Giants were looking for. Bumgarner's two-out fifth inning liner into left field brought home Austin Slater and pushed San Francisco ahead 2-1.

Bumgarner's second hit of the year was also the last one the Giants recorded until the eighth inning, but they found a way to add on to their advantage in the seventh. Recently acquired D'backs reliever Jake Diekman made his debut Thursday and after walking Slater, he tossed an errant pickoff throw to first and then threw a wild pitch which allowed the Giants first baseman to reach third.

Diekman was replaced by another new Arizona pitcher, Brad Ziegler, who was greeted by a long Hunter Pence sacrifice fly that extended the Giants lead to 3-1.

Though the Giants didn't provide Bumgarner with any run support in his last outing, he didn't have to wait long Thursday as third baseman Evan Longoria launched a first-inning curveball into the left field bleachers to push the Giants out in front.

Longoria barely tucked his 11th home run of the season inside the left field foul pole and by keeping the ball fair, he became just third player to homer off of Greinke in his last seven starts.

The Giants third baseman put a run on the board with his bat in the top of the inning before taking runs away from the D'backs in the bottom of the frame. With the bases loaded and one out, Longoria fully extended with a dive to nab a one-out line drive by Steven Souza that could have altered the course of the game.

Though the D'backs rallied to tie the game after Ketel Marte led off the second inning with a leadoff walk, Bumgarner worked his way out of another difficult situation and stranded a pair of runners by inducing a Paul Goldschmidt groundout to preserve the tie.

An Eduardo Escobar sacrifice fly and 30 foul balls on 101 Bumgarner pitches was all the D'backs had to show for their efforts, as the Giants ace labored through five challenging innings.

Bumgarner walked three hitters and allowed 10 baserunners Thursday, but Arizona left runners in scoring position in four of its first five innings and the Giants left-hander lowered his ERA to 2.97 by refusing to give in.

With the bases loaded and one out in the eighth inning, Bochy sent Alen Hanson to the plate to

replace substitute Chase d'Arnaud. With Ziegler on the mound, Hanson lined an RBI single into right field before Slater cleared the bases later in the inning with a single followed by an error from center fielder A.J. Pollock.

Black completes rare feat

By striking out a pair of hitters to open the bottom of the seventh Thursday, Giants reliever Ray Black finished off a "relief pitcher no-hitter."

Since July 10, Black has now thrown 9 1/3 innings without allowing a hit and has only given up one in his major league career. Black struck out 13 batters in the nine innings he needed to achieve the feat and threw a 99-mile per hour fastball past Goldschmidt Thursday.

MLB.com

Bumgarner gets better of Greinke in SF win

Jake Rill

PHOENIX -- **Madison Bumgarner** wasn't his best on Thursday night, but the Giants ace did enough on the mound, and at the the plate, to help steer San Francisco to a victory at the beginning of a crucial stretch.

The left-hander tossed five innings of one-run ball and knocked in the go-ahead run against **Zack Greinke**, while the Giants' bats came alive late in an 8-1 win over the D-backs in the opener of a four-game series at Chase Field. San Francisco started a stretch of 13 consecutive games against postseason contenders on Thursday, including two from the NL West -- the D-backs, Astros, Pirates and Dodgers.

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Although the Giants gained ground on the D-backs in the National League West, they remain five games behind the Dodgers, who took sole possession of first place with a win over the Brewers and Arizona's loss.

"Come with your best stuff, and these are the teams that we have to beat to make a push," said first baseman **Austin Slater**, who went 2-for-3 with two RBIs and three runs scored. "All of these teams are in front of us, and if we can gain ground on any of them, or all of them, that's what we're trying to do."

Bumgarner scattered seven hits, walked three and struck out five. He loaded the bases in the first and second innings but limited the D-backs to one run, which came on a one-out sacrifice fly by **Eduardo Escobar** in the second.

Although Bumgarner has gone deeper than six innings only three times in 11 starts this season, he has a 2.97 ERA. He stranded nine D-backs baserunners, seven of which were in scoring position, including seven in the first three innings.

"That's not the way I'd like to draw it up," Bumgarner said. "I'd like to be in there a lot longer than five innings and not have to work quite so hard. At the same time, those types of games are gratifying, to keep your team in it."

After Bumgarner's departure, San Francisco's bullpen combined for four scoreless innings and three hits allowed, with **Ty Blach** working the final two frames.

The Giants took a 2-1 lead in the fifth after Slater scored on a Bumgarner single to left field off Greinke, who allowed two runs on four hits over six innings.

Slater created another scoring opportunity in the seventh when he walked, advanced to second on an error and moved to third on a wild pitch. He scored on a **Hunter Pence** sacrifice fly to make it 3-1, before San Francisco padded its lead with a five-run eighth.

With **Brandon Belt** on the disabled list and **Pablo Sandoval** set to undergo season-ending hamstring surgery next week, Slater will need to play more first base, where he has played 17 games between Triple-A Sacramento and the Majors this season. He never played there in his four previous professional seasons, spending most of his time in the outfield.

"He's a pretty good hitter," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "He's getting a lot of playing time now and doing some good things. Here's a kid that we moved to first base. That's not an easy transition, although he played some first down there in Triple-A, but he's handling that well and he gives you good at-bats up there."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Big rally in eighth: The Giants sent 10 to the plate in the eighth, scoring five runs on six hits and an error. Slater had the big hit in the rally, a two-run single up the middle that was misplayed by D-backs center fielder **A.J. Pollock**, allowing a third run to score on the play and make it 7-1. **Steven Duggar**'s RBI single to right capped the scoring. Four of the five runs were charged to **Brad Ziegler**, whom the D-backs acquired at the non-waiver Trade Deadline.

A key moment came before any runs had been scored with one out and the bases loaded. After

pitching coach Mike Butcher made a visit to Ziegler, the Giants countered by pinch-hitting the left-handed-hitting **Alen Hanson** for **Chase d'Arnaud**. D-backs manager Torey Lovullo asked home-plate umpire Tony Randazzo if he could remove Ziegler. Typically, Lovullo would not be allowed because of Butcher's visit, which was what Randazzo told him. However, due to Rule 5.10 (I), Lovullo should have been allowed to go to the mound to remove Ziegler if he wanted.

"There's a caveat rule that says when there's a trip to the pitcher and then the guy leaves the mound and the offensive team then substitutes, it is then permissible by rule to then go to the mound to remove the pitcher," crew chief Bill Welke said.

Hanson drove in the first of five San Francisco runs that inning with a single.

SOUND SMART

Bumgarner has a 2.81 ERA in 105 2/3 career innings at Chase Field, which is the lowest in ballpark history (min. 15 starts). Hall of Famer and former D-backs great Randy Johnson is second at 2.96. **YOU GOTTA SEE THIS**

After homering in the top of the first inning, Giants third baseman **Evan Longoria** protected a 1-0 lead with a defensive gem in the bottom of the frame. With the bases loaded and one out, Longoria made a diving play to his left to rob **Steven Souza Jr.** of a hit and save at least one run. Bumgarner then escaped the inning unscathed. **More >UP NEXT**

The Giants send **Chris Stratton** to the mound to continue their series against the D-backs on Friday at 6:40 p.m. PT. Stratton is making his first start since July 3 after he was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on July 26. The right-hander made one relief appearance since his return, on July 26, when he allowed three runs in 1 1/3 innings against the Brewers. **Patrick Corbin** is slated to start for Arizona.

MLB.com

Longo homers off Greinke before diving play

Jake Rill

PHOENIX -- **Evan Longoria** had an eventful first inning on Thursday night. First, he gave San Francisco a quick lead. Then, he protected it.

In San Francisco's **8-1 win** at Chase Field, Longoria hit his 11th homer of the season off D-backs ace **Zack Greinke** to give the Giants a 1-0 lead, his first home run since hitting a pair on May 29. The San Francisco third baseman recently returned after missing six weeks due to surgery on his fractured left hand.

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"It's good to get on the board early facing the [National League] Pitcher of the Month," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "Greinke's been throwing the ball so well and we battled well."

Since coming off the disabled list, Longoria has a hit in six of seven games. He is 8-for-29 (.276) with a double, triple, homer and two RBIs over that stretch.

In the bottom of the first, Longoria helped Giants ace **Madison Bumgarner** escape a jam unscathed. With the bases loaded and one out, Longoria robbed **Steven Souza Jr.** of a hit with a diving grab to his left, saving at least one run on the play.

"That diving play, it saves you," Bochy said. "A play like that, it stops a rally. That ball gets through, they get momentum going. Huge play there for us. You want the ball hit to him. There are some errors, but he's a pro, he knows where to be, he knows himself well and he's got good range, he showed that on that line drive."

MLB.com

Sandoval (hamstring) to miss rest of 2018

Jake Rill

PHOENIX -- Giants manager Bruce Bochy received surprising news prior to Thursday's series opener against the D-backs at Chase Field, and it provided a big blow to his club.

Bochy announced that **Pablo Sandoval** will undergo season-ending surgery on his right hamstring next week. It has not yet been decided who will perform the operation or where it will take place.

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Sandoval sustained the injury during Sunday's game against the Padres when he slid awkwardly into home plate and then retreated to the dugout holding his leg. It was initially diagnosed as a right hamstring strain, but an MRI revealed it was much worse.

"It's a pretty good tear," Bochy said. "You'd never think a hamstring could keep him out over two months, but when it's this bad, it can."

The news of Sandoval's upcoming surgery came on the same day that starter **Johnny Cueto** underwent Tommy John surgery on his right elbow.

Sandoval batted .248/.310/.417 in 92 games with nine home runs and 40 RBIs this season, his first full year with the Giants since returning to the club as a free agent in July 2017. The 31-year-old provided versatility to San Francisco's infield, playing 36 games at first base, 24 at third, two at second and even making his big league pitching debut with a scoreless inning against the Dodgers on April 28.

"They all hurt, but Pablo was so valuable in all the roles that he had this season," Bochy said. "He did a really nice job defensively. He was a big part of this offense. When he wasn't playing, he was our pinch-hitter. He played second. This guy did everything, pitched. He was our third catcher. This is a tough one to overcome."

Bochy also praised Sandoval for the positivity he brings to the Giants' clubhouse. The third baseman, nicknamed "Kung Fu Panda," has played nine seasons for San Francisco, including winning three World Series championships in 2010, '12 and '14.

"That's Pablo. We say it so many times, the energy that he brings, we're going to miss that," Bochy said. "He'll be around once he gets through this surgery, and he'll be down there pulling for the boys."

Cueto undergoes successful surgery

Cueto underwent successful Tommy John surgery in Los Angeles on Thursday. The procedure was performed by Dr. Neal ElAttrache. Cueto is returning to San Francisco on Friday and will meet up with the Giants when they return home on Monday.

"It sounds like all went well, so now it's going to be 12-14 months, as far as his rehab," Bochy said.

Cueto went 3-2 with a 3.23 ERA in nine starts this season. Before missing May and June with a right elbow sprain, he went 3-0 with a 0.84 ERA in his first five outings of the year.

"Starting out the year, nobody was throwing the ball better than Johnny," Bochy said. "What a great start he got off to, probably right up there with being the best pitcher in baseball. It's always tough when you lose one of your top guys."

Injury updates

- Right-hander **Jeff Samardzija** (right shoulder inflammation) threw 20 pitches in a bullpen session on Thursday, and he will throw another session in a few days. Bochy said Samardzija is "making progress."

- Right-hander **Hunter Strickland** (right hand fracture) threw 20 pitches against hitters at the Giants' Minor League complex in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Thursday. Bochy said Strickland should be ready to come off the 60-day DL close to when he is eligible on Aug. 18. This was the first time Strickland faced hitters since sustaining the injury.
- First baseman **Brandon Belt** (hyperextended right knee) could be out an additional 10-14 days, according to Bochy. Belt is currently swinging indoors and will field grounders this weekend.

The Athletic

Giants' injury storm swallows Pablo Sandoval, but Evan Lonforia and two rookies help keep them on the right track in Arizona

Andrew Baggarly

PHOENIX — Giants infielder Chase d'Arnaud stood on the dirt near second base, glanced up at the roof of an enclosed ballpark and watched the most peculiar rainfall he'd ever seen.

As the Giants and Diamondbacks played a baseball game indoors Thursday night, it was end times outside. A dust storm swallowed downtown whole and then the torrents arrived behind it. The locals call this kind of late summer storm a haboob and they mostly shrug at them. They know when a visit to the car wash is a waste of money. They know to invest in the more expensive pool cover, and remember to set it out. They choose to live in a place where it's 112 in the shade, and stand in the path of the occasional apocalyptic tsunami of particulate matter, and yet they feel no compulsion to demonstrate their sanity to visitors. It's a dry heat, they'll tell you. Except when it rains hard enough to leak through a seam in the retractable roof.

The Giants this season keep getting caught out of doors at the worst possible times. On the day that Johnny Cueto underwent Tommy John surgery, manager Bruce Bochy finished giving the standard update to reporters about the successful procedure that will leave the Giants without one of their rotation anchors for more than a year.

Then Bochy dropped an anvil.

Pablo Sandoval is out for the year, too. Hamstring tendon surgery.

The Giants knew the severity of Sandoval's injury last Monday in San Diego, when they put him in an MRI tube before placing him on the 10-day disabled list and reported his injury as a strain. The rest was a strategic omission. When you are 48 hours from the July 31 trade deadline, your undisclosed weaknesses are best left undisclosed to a general public that includes your fellow baseball executives.

The Giants did nothing at the deadline, of course, and they entered a four-game series at Chase Field with one more versatile and inspirational piece off their chessboard. They all hurt, Bochy said. This one really hurts.

They'll get Brandon Belt back from the disabled list in another week. Until then, rookie Austin Slater is the first baseman. And third baseman Evan Longoria had better stay healthy, along with everyone else.

The Diamondbacks began the day tied with the Dodgers for first place in the NL West, with the Giants in fourth place and five games back. And while it's never this simple with two months to play, Arizona had the chance in this four-game series to effectively knock out a division rival who found itself extremely short-stacked.

But the Giants caught runner-runner. The Diamondbacks stranded theirs. The result was an 8-1 victory for the Giants that appeared so improbable when you studied the fates and the fastballs of both starting pitchers.

Madison Bumgarner did not come anywhere close to outdueling Zack Greinke, who was just named NL pitcher of the month for July after going 4-0 with a 1.60 ERA in five starts. But Bumgarner got the win anyway, surviving five innings in which he threw 101 pitches, got peppered for 30 foul balls, allowed 10 baserunners (stranding nine) and recorded hard out after hard out that you could hang laundry on.

One of those hard outs was a bases-loaded line drive in the first inning that required a full-extension dive to Longoria's glove side to save a couple of runs. It was Longoria's second high-impact contribution of the night; he also pulled Greinke's breaking ball and used some Carlton Fisk body language down the line while watching his drive curl just inside the left field pole for his 11th home run.

The Giants were pragmatic when they acquired Longoria, hoping he could be a solid player if not a superstar for a good portion of the four seasons on his contract. But lest they abandon the scant hope that remains, there will be times down the stretch when they'll need a bit more twinkle out of him — and now that there is so little third base depth behind him, his days off will be almost non-existent.

Slater is their fallback across the diamond, playing a position that remains mostly foreign to him. But his first baseman's mitt already saved one game on this trip in San Diego when he picked a throw in the dirt, and he upped his average to .323 while contributing to three scoring rallies that put the Giants ahead and added to their lead.

He doubled in the fifth and scored the tiebreaking run when Bumgarner turned around one of Greinke's fastballs for a single. In his previous at-bat, Bumgarner stared back at the mound when Greinke struck him out on a curveball. Did Bumgarner goad Greinke into throwing the pitch he wanted? Probably not. He got it anyway.

The Giants led 2-1 after five innings, but their bullpen needed oxygen bottles to make it to Wednesday's break in the schedule and the last thing Bochy wanted was to tap all his front-line relievers in the opener of a four-game series in this lively ballpark. The series wasn't setting up so well, especially since the Giants cannot afford to split here or worse. At this point, to stand still is to die of exposure.

But Mark Melancon survived a hit and a lineout in the sixth inning. Rookie right-hander Ray Black — more on him in a moment — torched the heart of the Diamondbacks lineup in the seventh.

And then the Giants offense did what it must from time to time: it relieved the pressure. They unleashed their own haboob against a pair of the Diamondbacks' trade-deadline bullpen acquisitions, Jake Diekman and Brad Ziegler, in a five-run eighth inning.

Alen Hanson, who is 8 for 14 as a pinch-hitter, singled in a run with the bases loaded. Then Slater cleared them in unlikely fashion, hitting an innocent chopper up the middle that poured through another seam in the Diamondbacks' shallow infield. A momentary clank by center fielder A.J. Pollock was all it took for Hanson to score from first base. Another rookie, Steven Dugger, followed with an RBI single that capped the rally.

As a result, Bochy was able to use long man Ty Blach to get the final six outs. And at the end of the night, the Giants used just one of their front-line relievers.

That was not Melancon but Black, who pulled off a low-key feat when he extended his streak to 28 outs recorded without allowing a hit. He started the seventh inning by striking out Paul Goldschmidt with a 99 mph fastball and then dusting A.J. Pollock with a filthy slider to complete the reliever's version of a no-hitter.

Black hasn't allowed a hit since he broke china in his shaky, adrenaline-fueled major-league debut on July 8. In nine outings since then, he has thrown 9 1/3 hitless innings, walked three and struck out 13.

Dozens of very good relief pitchers swapped jerseys in the past couple weeks. Black might turn out to be a bigger weapon than any of them.

"He's been impressive, hasn't he?" Bochy said. "I just like his poise out there. He had a rough first one and bounced back. He's confident in his breaking ball and getting it over any time He's pitching with a lot of confidence."

Black thinks of it more like a transference of confidence. He acknowledged that he not only overthrew in his debut, but also overruled catcher Buster Posey.

Did he shake off a few times?

"Ohhhh yeah," he said.

And?

"Not any more," he said

Well, there was one time he shook off backup catcher Nick Hundley.

"He put down a two," Black said. "I shook no. And he put down a two."

The rough debut was difficult to process, but as Black said, "Adversity has been a part of my career." So while working to tighten his slider and maintain his direction to home plate and

make sure he didn't baby those two-strike breaking pitches, since hitters at this level will swing at a curve in the dirt, too, he told himself to make one more adjustment.

He decided to throw what Posey and Hundley put down.

"They're doing all the work," Black said. "They're evaluating the hitter. I'm just throwing the pitches. I'm the robot out there."

They are not robots, of course, otherwise we could run ZiPS and Steamer and PECOTA and Marcel and Biancalana, the latter of which isn't the name of an actual projection simulator, or at least not yet.

They will have the very human response of missing the Panda, who has become their spirit animal this season. They will miss Cueto for much longer. They are their two players who exude the most joy on the field, which can have an unmatched ability to energize a team when it is playing for the 17th time in 17 days.

They will just have to make their own joy for the next two months, and hope the cracks hold against whatever misfortune may come.

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Ray Black moves up in depth chart, completes his own version of no-hitter

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — There are so many superstitions that dugouts adhere to during a no-hitter. If there are similar superstitions for a reliever no-hitter, Ray Black didn't know about them.

In fact, Black didn't even know he had thrown nine consecutive hitless innings until he returned to the clubhouse after an 8-1 win over the Diamondbacks and checked his phone. It's a little harder to keep track when the dominance comes over three weeks, not three hours.

But Black won't be able to fly under the radar anymore. Bruce Bochy made a subtle but substantive change on Thursday night, using Mark Melancon in the sixth and Black in the seventh, with the Giants holding a 3-1 lead. Afterward, Bochy did not shy away from a role change.

"That's why I used him when I did," Bochy said of Black.

It appears the rookie is now in the late-innings mix. It also appears he's fully ready for the challenge. After giving up a three-run homer in his MLB debut, Black has thrown 9 1/3 hitless innings. He struck out two Thursday: Paul Goldschmidt and A.J. Pollock.

It isn't just that Black is putting up hitless frames. **It is how he's doing it.** The first batter he faced Thursday was Goldschmidt, and Black got ahead in the count before dotting a 99.4 mph fastball down and away, right on the corner of the strike zone. Goldschmidt feebly waived at it.

Black said his mentality was simple: "Challenge him."

"He's a great hitter. Guys like that, you've got to give credit," he continued. "But when you're out there you're competing and have to trust your own stuff as well. When a guy like that steps in the box, you can't be too timid. Pay him great respect, know who he is, but at the end of the day, it's about competing."

Pollock swung through a slider in the same spot, giving Black his bullpen no-hitter.

When Steven Souza popped out, Black had his ninth consecutive scoreless appearance. He had an ERA of 81.00 after his big league debut but it's all the way down to 2.79.

"He's got confidence with his breaking ball and he's getting it over any time, and of course he's got the big fastball," Bochy said. "He's pitching with a lot of confidence."

--- Black is the first Giants reliever with 9 1/3 hitless innings since Yusmeiro Petit went 12 1/3 hitless in 2014.

--- Madison Bumgarner beat the Diamondbacks for the first time in two years and one month. He threw 70 pitches in the first three innings, but survived long enough to let the offense break through. He helped, of course, with an RBI single.

A couple days ago, I asked Andrew Suarez if he had told Bumgarner that he had more hits than him. Suarez said no, but he might on this road trip. I hope he did it quickly. In the **game story, Bumgarner talks about why this night was gratifying.**

--- The big pre-game news was a stunner. **Pablo Sandoval is having season-ending hamstring surgery next week.** But there were other tidbits that got lost in the shuffle. Brandon Belt is still 8-10 days from returning, Bochy said. Jeff Samardzija threw a light bullpen session and will do so again in a few days. It seems he is still weeks away from being an option. Hunter Strickland faced hitters at the minor league facility and is just about ready, but the Giants cannot activate him until Aug. 18 because they put him on the 60-day DL.

--- Given the way Brad Ziegler's debut went, it's unlikely he'll use the bullpen cart again. But Ziegler did become the first Diamondback to use it, **and it was awesome.**

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants shake off latest injuries, keep winning streak going vs D'backs

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — So much of the talk around the trade deadline focused around selling, but in the clubhouse, it was different. Players are glued to Twitter just as fans are, and in the days leading up to July 31, several asked reporters if they were hearing anything.

They were not concerned about a sale. They wanted to know if Brian Sabean and Bobby Evans would add to the roster for the stretch run.

The front office did not, in part because this team is right up against the luxury tax and cannot afford another veteran, and in part, frankly, because that same clubhouse has played .500 baseball the entire season. The group is the group, Sabean and Evans essentially said. If you're going to make a run, do it with the guys you have. Thus far, the clubhouse has responded.

The Giants came into Chase Field on a 108-degree night and got hot at the plate, winning 8-1 to grab a fourth consecutive win. After an ugly weekend at home, they are once again two games above .500, and they continue to trail just a few steps behind the NL West leaders.

They did it Thursday night in all sorts of ways. Madison Bumgarner was resilient. Evan Longoria reminded a fan base that, as much as it hurt to lose Pablo Sandoval, he was brought here to be the standout at third base. Austin Slater, Steven Duggar, Alen Hanson and Ray Black continued to show off a youth movement.

"That's what it's going to take," manager Bruce Bochy said. "We can't dwell on what happened. Those are tough losses (in Johnny Cueto and Sandoval), but you hear me say it so many times, it's all about focusing forward. Some guys are going to get great opportunities."

Duggar was not impacted by injuries. He already had taken over the job in center, but Slater, still just 25, has the most to gain. Sandoval is done for the year with a hamstring tear and Brandon Belt could be 10 days away from returning. That mostly leaves first base to Slater, who has hit at every professional level. He had two hits and a walk Thursday, raising his average to .323. His single up the middle was the big blow in a five-run eighth.

"It's exciting for me," Slater said. "I look forward to the opportunity and the challenge. I might not have that much experience (at first) but I try to pick up on little things."

He's doing that in a unique way. Slater said he's taking full advantage of four games with the Diamondbacks, closely watching Gold Glove winner Paul Goldschmidt to see if he can pick up on nuances of playing first base.

"You watch his game and he does everything right," Slater said.

The Giants did not on Thursday, but they were close. Longoria got it going with a solo shot in the top of the first and saved two runs in the bottom of the inning by diving for a stop. Bumgarner did not let that go to waste, repeatedly finding his way through traffic jams. He gave up seven hits and walked three, but allowed just one run in five innings. He also drove in a run.

The Giants have wasted so many Bumgarner gems over the years. He went eight innings in his last start and took the loss. On this night, he fought his way through five and then watched the lineup — full of young contributors — do the rest.

“It was a grind,” Bumgarner said. “That’s one of those games when my back is kind of against the wall the whole time out there. Those types of games are gratifying to keep your team in it.”

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Bumgarner battles, Giants’ bats wake up late to take down D’backs

Alex Pavlovic

PHOENIX — Madison Bumgarner didn’t go as deep as he normally does, but he bowed his neck, as Bruce Bochy likes to say, and the lineup did the rest.

The Giants got two runs off Zack Greinke, who was named NL Pitcher of the Month earlier in the day, and pulled away with a five-run eighth, beating the Diamondbacks 8-1 and giving Bumgarner a win on a night he struggled to get through five.

The Giants have won four straight after a mini losing streak, keeping touch with the leaders in the National League West. Here’s what you need to know ...

--- It is rather remarkable that Bumgarner allowed just one run in his five innings. He gave up seven hits and walked three, and loaded the bases in each of the first two innings. But he escaped trouble, in part because Evan Longoria snagged a liner in the first that would have scored two. Bumgarner needed 70 pitches to get through the first three innings and was done after 101.

--- Bumgarner took a long look back at the mound after Greinke threw him a couple of 70 mph curveballs to strike him out in the third inning. Pitchers usually don’t do that to other pitchers, but to be fair to Greinke, Bumgarner has taken him deep twice. With a runner on second in the fifth, Bumgarner waited around for his fastball and smoked it into left to give the Giants a 2-1 lead.

--- Longoria got the Giants on the board with a solo shot on a slow curveball in the first inning. He tucked the shot just inside the left field pole. The homer was Longoria’s first since coming off the DL and 11th of the year, putting him in a tie for third on the team, behind Brandon Belt and Gorkys Hernandez.

--- There has been a shift in the bullpen. Mark Melancon pitched the sixth and Ray Black followed him in the seventh. It looks like it'll stay that way, too. Melancon gave up a couple of rockets but no runs. Black struck out two and extended his hitless streak to 9 1/3 innings.

--- The Giants gave a rude welcome to two new Diamondbacks relievers. They jumped on Jake Diekman and Brad Ziegler, scoring one in the seventh and five in the eighth. Austin Slater had the big knock, a single up the middle that cleared the bases.

ESPN.com

This just might be the best Red Sox team...ever

David Schoenfield

This fascinates me, more than it probably should: Since the advent of the 162-game schedule, the Boston Red Sox have never won 100 games. Of course, many franchises have failed to achieve that mark, but it's interesting in Boston's case because the Red Sox have long been one of the most successful teams in the majors. Since 1967, when the Impossible Dream Red Sox snapped a string of eight consecutive losing seasons and won the American League pennant, the Red Sox have the second-most wins in the majors, trailing only their rivals from the Bronx, and have had just nine losing seasons in those 51 completed campaigns.

Yet, no 100-win seasons, even though other teams have done it 53 times since 1967 -- including eight by the Yankees. The closest the Red Sox came was 1978, when they finished 99-63, tied with the Yankees for the AL East lead. That required a one-game playoff, which counts as a regular-season game, and you may remember that Bucky Dent hit an important home run off Mike Torrez. The Yankees won 100 games and the Red Sox went home.

The 2018 Red Sox, barring an unforeseen fade down the stretch, are going to soar past 100 wins. They're 76-34, on pace for 112 wins. It would be the franchise's first 100-win season since the 1946 club went 104-50. The franchise's other two 100-win seasons came in the halcyon days of the 1910s, when the Red Sox won four World Series titles from 1912 to 1918 and a young lefty named Babe Ruth contributed to the final three of those championships.

The best team in Red Sox history, however, is the 2004 club, in part for sentimental, curse-breaking reasons, which obviously are a key component of that team's legacy, but also because it was a legitimately great team, finishing 98-64. They finished second to the Yankees in the division, but they outscored their opponents by 181 runs compared to just 89 for the Yankees. One reason the Red Sox were able to come back from a 3-0 deficit in the American League Championship Series is because they were the better team.

The 2018 Red Sox are an even more dominant team. They've already outscored their opponents by 184 runs. They've scored the most runs in the American League and allowed the second fewest. They have a Triple Crown candidate in J.D. Martinez, and he's not even the best player on the team. That's Mookie Betts, the do-everything supernova in right field. Then there's Chris Sale, who started his third straight All-Star Game and was having his best season until he landed on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation. That's expected to be a short stint and Sale should still factor into the Cy Young voting.

What strikes me are the similarities to the 2004 club. The most obvious one is the first-year Red Sox managers. Terry Francona had managed the Phillies, but he took over the Red Sox before the 2004 season, replacing Grady Little after Little left a tiring Pedro Martinez in too long in Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS. Alex Cora is a rookie skipper, and like Francona he brings a positive energy and strong communication skills to the job.

The '04 Red Sox had the 1-2 punch of David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez to anchor the lineup. The 2018 Red Sox have Martinez and Betts. Ortiz and Manny combined for 84 home runs and 269 RBIs, but Martinez and Betts compare favorably:

Ortiz: .301/.380/.603, .408 wOBA, 147 wRC+ (5th in AL)

Ramirez: .308/.397/.613, .417 wOBA, 153 wRC+ (4th in AL)

Martinez: .322/.388/.637, .426 wOBA, 171 RC+ (4th in AL)

Betts: .339/.423/.649, .446 wOBA, 184 wRC+ (2nd in AL)

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Indeed, once you adjust for eras, Martinez and Betts actually fare better in wRC+ (weighted runs created). Understand that in 2004, the AL average runs per game was 5.01; in 2018, it's 4.49. Martinez and Betts are beating Ortiz's and Ramirez's production in a lower-scoring environment. Incredible.

The 2004 team averaged 5.86 runs per game; the 2018 team is at 5.34, so both are pretty close in their edge over the league average. The 2004 lineup may have run a little deeper, especially in the postseason when Trot Nixon was healthy after missing much of the regular season.

The 2018 team may be the better defensive team given Ramirez's deficiencies in left field and Johnny Damon's noodle arm in center. In fact, the 2004 team took off after franchise icon Nomar Garciaparra was traded at the July 31 deadline, his defense at shortstop no longer deemed acceptable, with Orlando Cabrera brought in to replace him. The 2018 Sox also made a deadline move in the middle infield, adding Ian Kinsler to play second base.

Of course, the '04 champs had the 1-2 rotation punch of Pedro Martinez and Curt Schilling, although Pedro had a so-so 3.90 ERA that year after leading the AL in ERA in four of the

previous five seasons. Schilling went 21-6, 3.26 in '04. The '18 Red Sox may not have that No. 2 guy, but the overall rotation is much deeper, as Derek Lowe (5.42 ERA) and Tim Wakefield (4.87) were mediocre in 2004. One thing the '04 rotation did have was great health, as the top five starters -- Bronson Arroyo was the fifth guy -- all made at least 29 starts and started 157 of the 162 games.

The one thing the 2004 team had was no fear. "The Idiots" played hard and partied hard. As Bob Hohler wrote in the Boston Globe on the 10-year anniversary celebration of the team, "They were 'idiots' to the end -- lovable, laughable, irascible and a little incorrigible. They had a taste for liquor before lunch and a knack for turning a victory party into a circus."

In some fashion, as good as the 2018 Red Sox have been, their identity has yet to be defined. Granted, it's impossible to match the larger-than-life personalities of Papi, Pedro and Manny, not to mention Schilling, Damon and Kevin Millar. The three superstars carrying the team in 2018 are dynamic between the lines, but far less quotable in the clubhouse.

Ultimately, no matter how many more games the 2018 Red Sox win than the 2004 Red Sox, this year's team will be measured by one target: winning the final game of the season. Personally, I find that a little unfortunate. The all-or-nothing nature of that evaluation reduces the regular season to an insignificance beyond simply qualifying a team for the postseason. The beauty of a great team is doing it over 162 games. Sure, you want them to finish it off, but the postseason is a short affair where anything can happen, where an entire series can turn on one stolen base.

As Red Sox fans will remind us, Dave Roberts stole that base -- and seven games later, he was a member of the greatest team in Red Sox history.