



## SF Giants Press Clips Sunday, September 9, 2018

**San Francisco Chronicle**

**Giants lose 7<sup>th</sup> straight despite Ryder Jones' pinch homer  
Henry Schulman**

MILWAUKEE — The waning days of the Giants' season have become an athletic death march.

Their makeshift lineups are filled with earnest players trying to win — kids, journeymen and a regular here or there, and they pitch well enough to keep most games interesting.

So it was Saturday night when they lost their seventh in a row, 4-3 to the Brewers. Ryder Jones made it close with a pinch-hit, two-run homer in the eighth against Joakim Soria.

Still, a quick glance at the lineup cards on this trip, against two teams holding playoff positions, sometimes makes it seem like their opponents are in a different league.

Saturday's Giants Nine had combined for 38 home runs. The Brewers, who have two MVP candidates atop their lineup in Lorenzo Cain and Christian Yelich, had 148. They made that an even 150 when Yelich and Travis Shaw took Chris Stratton deep.

Such is the price a team pays for injuries, surrender and reconstruction.

On Aug. 31, the night the Giants traded Andrew McCutchen to signal "no mas" for this year, they beat the Mets 7-0. They have not won since then.

The sudden absences of McCutchen and rookie center fielder Steven Duggar, who was a firecracker before he dislocated his shoulder, have sucked a lot of life and talent from this team.

“I don’t know how you can say that doesn’t have an effect,” manager Bruce Bochy said, “an impact guy like McCutchen; Duggar, the way he played on both sides of the ball. That’s the tough part of the game, when these guys go down, and Buster (Posey), but you’ve got to move on.

“We can’t talk about what we don’t have.”

With Duggar out, the Giants don’t have that blue-chip prospect who is a sure bet to land a starting job in 2019. Watching the growth of exciting players like that can make these endless games to play out the string somewhat worthwhile.

Which is not to say the Giants lack promising rookies trying to make an impression for 2019.

Jones, who is not a rookie, understands he is blocked at his two positions on the infield corners, but he also knows he could be part of the mix if he shows he can pinch-hit. His first-pitch, two-run blast to center in the eighth was an eye-opener. That swing alone helped his 2019 chances.

“I hope so,” he said. “That’s definitely the goal. Everyone here wants to be on the Opening Day roster next year. You just want to be aggressive and show what you can do.”

Rookie Austin Slater produced the Giants’ first run with an RBI single off Gio Gonzalez, who was making his Milwaukee debut after his acquisition from Washington.

With Jones’ homer closing the gap to a run, the game turned on a confrontation later in the eighth between closer Jeremy Jeffress and Hunter Pence. Bochy could have had Brandon Belt bat for Pence. In fact, Bochy sent Belt on deck to hit for Aramis Garcia.

Like usual, though, Bochy put his faith in Pence, who had doubled against Gonzalez. If Belt were hitting better, or healthier, Bochy might have made the switch.

But Pence it was, and Jeffress struck him out with a fastball.

“If you look at Hunter, he’s had some big hits for us in that situation,” Bochy said. “You look at his previous at-bats, he has a knack for finding a way to come through. He had a nice hit earlier in the game, and he was in the flow of the game. He’s a veteran who wants to be in that situation.”

The Brewers had taken a 4-0 lead in the fourth when Stratton walked the first two hitters and they scored — a problem for the staff that won't go away.

Also, the Giants' string of 17 successful steal attempts ended when Kelby Tomlinson was caught in the first inning.

**San Francisco Chronicle**  
**Giants reliever Tony Watson won't blame fatigue for decline**  
**Henry Schulman**

MILWAUKEE — The Giants' bullpen has had a rough go lately, and nobody's about-face has been more jarring than left-hander **Tony Watson's**.

As Watson pitched to a 1.50 ERA over his first 42 games, the Giants were talking about him as a potential All-Star and everyone viewed his spring training signing as a major coup.

In 22 games since July 9, he has an ERA of 6.23, putting his season's ERA at 2.88. He also has endured a huge leap in opponents' batting average (.247 prior, .315 since) and OPS (.499 prior, .929 since).

The reasons are a mystery.

The 33-year-old could blame fatigue, especially after pitching through Game 7 of the World Series last year with the Dodgers, making 11 postseason appearances. He said his arm feels great, although manager **Bruce Bochy** has held him back a few times this season fearing overwork.

"I don't know if it's anything pitch-sequence-wise," Watson said. "Maybe the league is adjusting a little bit. I still have a lot of confidence going out there. The numbers are the numbers. We'll look at the end of the year and see where they are."

Watson has had a trying trip.

After the Giants fought back from 7-2 down to take an 8-7 lead in the eighth inning in Denver on Monday, Watson allowed two runs in the bottom half and the Giants lost 9-8.

In Friday's opener against the Brewers, he relieved **Hunter Strickland** with two aboard and one out, struck out **Christian Yelich** with a changeup, then served up **Jesus Aguilar's** decisive two-run double on a changeup below the knees — but maybe not low enough.

Watson and Strickland are among several struggling relievers, but Bochy is going to use them because he can't fry the few who are pitching well.

Watson is nearing the end of a complex contract, with easily achievable escalators, that amounts to a three-year, \$21 million deal as long as he stays healthy and picks up his 2020 player option.

**Catching plans:** **Aramis Garcia** made his third start Saturday, the first with a pitcher other than **Andrew Suarez**. **Nick Hundley** was off on his 35th birthday because Bochy plans to start him in Sunday's day game.

"I have no problem pairing him with anybody," Bochy said of the rookie catcher. "Nick's going to get a lot of time. He's done a great job. With the job Garcia has done, he's showing he can handle anybody. He really has made a ton of progress this year."

## San Jose Mercury News

### Giants winless on road trip, offense continues to struggle in loss to Brewers

Kerry Crowley

MILWAUKEE—The Milwaukee Brewers are leading the National League Wildcard race, but by no means are they a lock to make the playoffs or a popular bet to advance deep into the postseason. But when the Giants have taken the field against the Brewers this season, it's clear just how big of a gap there is between a National League contender and a Giants club that fell to seven games under .500 with a 4-3 loss.

Though manager Bruce Bochy's club only lost by a run Saturday, the Giants haven't scored more than three in back-to-back games since August 25-26.

While San Francisco's pitching staff has strung together respectable performances in a hitter-friendly Miller Park, the Giants' offense simply hasn't had the firepower to match up with any opponents of late and that was once again the case in Saturday's defeat.

After falling to the Brewers Saturday, the Giants are in the midst of a season-high seven-game losing streak and are in danger of dropping every game on a six-game road trip if they can't salvage Sunday's matinee.

With Andrew McCutchen playing for the Yankees and Brandon Belt and Brandon Crawford dealing with lingering knee injuries, the Giants started Saturday's game without the leaders from an offense that was already below average with their names on the lineup card.

While Belt and Crawford did pinch hit, the Giants won't have the luxury of using Buster Posey, Steven Duggar or Pablo Sandoval to end the losing streak as all three are out for the year.

"We can't talk about what we don't have," Bochy said. "We've got some guys who are getting a chance to show what they can do up here."

One of the auditioning talents is Ryder Jones, who cut a three-run deficit to one with a 112-mile per hour laser over the right center field fence in an eighth inning pinch hit appearance.

"That's the goal, everybody here wants to be on the Opening Day roster next year," Jones said. "You just try to go out there and do what you can and show your ability."

The eight position players that started against Milwaukee Saturday had combined for 38 home runs this season, 30 of which came from Evan Longoria and Gorkys Hernández. On the opposing side, four of the first six hitters in the Brewers lineup had at least 25 home runs heading into their matchup with Giants starter Chris Stratton.

Stratton didn't give up many hits to the Brewers, but the ones he did were crushed. In five innings of work, the right-hander allowed four hits, but two went for home runs and another was laced down the left field line for an RBI double.

Brewers second baseman Travis Shaw slammed his 28th home run of the year in the first before left fielder Christian Yelich matched Shaw's season total with his own solo shot in the fifth. The Giants haven't had a player reach the 28-home run threshold since Barry Bonds did so in 2007, his final season in the big leagues.

The only inning in which Stratton allowed more than one run came in the fourth, when the first two hitters reached on walks. Though Stratton's command was much better after he returned to the rotation in August, he took a step backward Saturday against one of the toughest lineups in the National League.

"Made some good pitches that they ended up getting some hits on," Stratton said. "The biggest thing was the two walks there to start the inning just crushed us. Ends up giving them two runs and that's honestly the difference in the game."

In his debut with the Brewers, left-hander Gio Gonzalez outlasted Stratton, recording 5 2/3 innings of one-run ball while allowing four hits to a San Francisco lineup that didn't start a single regular with an OPS above .715. Though rookie catcher Aramis Garcia entered with an

OPS of 1.750, Garcia only had eight at-bats under his belt and posted a .285 on-base percentage across two minor league levels this season.

Despite allowing at least five earned runs in three of his last four starts, Gonzalez had little trouble shutting down the Giants, limiting San Francisco to one extra base hit and a 1-for-4 mark with runners in scoring position.

That one hit with a runner in scoring position came courtesy of right fielder Austin Slater, who lined an RBI single to left field to put the Giants on the board in the sixth.

“We could use a break,” Bochy said. “You get in a rut like this and it seems like whether it’s bloopers or calls, all the little things seem to go against you.”

## **San Jose Mercury News**

### **Giants’ quest for more versatile defenders, super-utility talents continues**

**Kerry Crowley**

MILWAUKEE—Four games, three different shortstops.

September baseball and expanded rosters lead to experiments clubs typically aren’t willing to try at other points in the season, and the Giants are among those who can use the final weeks of the season to evaluate younger talent.

Rookie Abiatal Avelino will make his major league debut Saturday in Milwaukee, a day after utility player Alen Hanson played shortstop in Brandon Crawford’s place. Crawford started the team’s first two games at Coors Field this week, but he’s dealing with lingering knee soreness and will sit for the sixth time in eight games.

The Giants actually have five players with experience at shortstop on their 32-man roster, as Kelby Tomlinson and Chase d’Arnaud have both earned time at the position in their careers. But after trading Andrew McCutchen for Avelino and pitching prospect Juan De Paula last week, the Giants want to see how the 23-year-old looks in a major league game.

Avelino may not have the tools to become an everyday infielder, but he has speed and defensive versatility, two qualities the Giants could use more of in the coming years. While shortstop is his primary position, Avelino can play second base and manager Bruce Bochy said the club may look at him in the outfield down the line.

The Giants have several multi-positional utility players, but they don’t have a Ben Zobrist or Kiké Hernández-type player who can be counted on to move around the field and play in 130-

plus games. That could change in the future, particularly if Avelino or switch-hitter Alen Hanson become reliable defenders in the outfield.

“I think a lot of clubs are doing it too because it gives you flexibility,” Bochy said of developing utility players. “You don’t know what’s going to happen to your club, what position, plus when you come up at times, you need a guy that’s got versatility. You look for that super-utility guy who can play anywhere.”

Hanson has played in 95 games for the Giants this season, filling in as a starting second baseman during Joe Panik’s injury absences and spelling Crawford at times. Hanson has appeared in 36 games at second, 15 in left, 14 at second, seven at third and in 26 games as a pinch hitter, and he’s hit right-handed pitchers well enough that he could earn a larger role next season.

While some super-utility players like the Dodgers’ Hernández have the defensive versatility to play any position on the diamond, Hanson’s defense was a work in progress at the beginning of the year.

“Nothing fazes him,” Bochy said. “He’s got no reservation, any apprehension playing a different position. He just loves playing and it shows when he plays. He’s always got a smile on his face wherever you put him.”

Nearly every player who has spent considerable time on the Giants’ bench this season has the flexibility to help at multiple spots, including Pablo Sandoval who played in 32 games at third base, 24 at first base and even two at second.

It will take time before the Giants trust Avelino anywhere other than the middle infield spots, but it would help his chances of earning a major league roster spot next season if Avelino can build his defensive profile.

“You pigeonhole a guy at a position, it’s tough,” Bochy said.

### **Belt scratched**

Giants first baseman Brandon Belt was scratched from Saturday’s game with a sore right knee.

To account for Belt’s absence, d’Arnaud will shift from second base to first base while Kelby Tomlinson will start and play second.

Bochy said Friday he was considering giving Belt the day off Saturday due to the knee soreness, but wanted to check with him before doing so.

**MLB.com**

**Jones' HR a spark, but Giants' skid continues**

**Andrew Wagner**

MILWAUKEE -- Offense is still a problem for the San Francisco Giants, but manager Bruce Bochy saw reason for optimism in his team's 4-3 loss to the Milwaukee Brewers on Saturday evening at Miller Park.

Trailing, 4-0, after the fifth, the Giants caught a break and scored a run on an overturned call in the sixth inning and clawed within one on a two-run, pinch-hit home run by **Ryder Jones** in the eighth. They put the go-ahead run in scoring position later in the inning before the rally was snuffed out by Brewers closer **Jeremy Jeffress**.

**View Full Game Coverage**

"I liked the way they kept fighting," Bochy said. "You hate losing but they came to life against some good pitching."

Jones' home run was his second in four Major League games this season, matching the two he hit in 53 games in 2017.

"He gave me a first-pitch changeup that was elevated, so I just tried to put a good swing on it," Jones said.

- **Just looking at Avelino's bizarre warmup routine is painful**

After going 0-for-6 a night earlier with runners in scoring position, the Giants went 1-for-5 Saturday.

"We got close there," Bochy said. "We just needed another hit."

**Chris Stratton** only allowed four hits over five innings but two of those hits were solo home runs by **Travis Shaw** and **Christian Yelich**. Stratton walked three and struck out six while taking the loss for a second consecutive start.

Stratton hadn't allowed more than three earned runs in each of his last three starts and had given up just four total and only one home run during that stretch. He's taken the loss in six of his last eight decisions, posting a 4.24 ERA in those contests.

"I thought we did a pretty good job today, honestly," Stratton said. "I made some good pitches that they ended up getting some hits on."



The Giants fell to 1-5 against Milwaukee the season. They've been outscored 30-20 in those contests.

### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

**Walks burn Stratton:** Stratton walked **Jesus Aguilar** and **Curtis Granderson** to open the fourth inning. Those free passes came back to haunt him quickly as **Mike Moustakas** brought home Aguilar with a double through the hole at shortstop and **Orlando Arcia** hit a sacrifice fly, making it a 3-0 game.

"That just crushed us," Stratton said. "It turned out being the difference in the game."

### **MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY**

Making his Brewers debut, **Gio Gonzalez** looked like he was about to get through six scoreless innings when **Chase d'Arnaud** was called out trying to score from second on **Austin Slater's** two-out single. Bochy challenged the call and after a review, the call was overturned, making it a 4-1 game and chasing Gonzalez.

"Live, obviously I didn't think he got in there, but on replay it was an unbelievable slide," said Yelich. "I don't know how he was able to contort his body like that. He kind of dragged his back foot across the plate, which I've never really seen before. Credit to him for a great slide. That was pretty awesome."

The Giants lead the Majors in successful challenges this season, winning 24 of 30.

### **UP NEXT**

Left-hander **Madison Bumgarner** looks to stay perfect at Miller Park on Sunday when he takes the mound for the 11:10 a.m. PT series finale against the Brewers and **Zach Davies**. Bumgarner is 3-0 with a 2.36 ERA in four career starts at Milwaukee and the Giants have won each of those four contests. Bumgarner tied his career high with three home runs allowed his last time out but has held opponents to three runs or fewer in 13 of his 17 starts this season.

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Giants continue to mix and match lineups in season full of injuries**

**Alex Pavlovic**

MILWAUKEE — On May 31, Hunter Pence played his final game of an extended rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento. He hit one spot behind Austin Slater and three in front of Chase d’Arnaud. Aramis Garcia was in Double-A at the time. Abiatal Avelino was in Triple-A with the Yankees.

Chris Stratton spent a chunk of his season in Triple-A. Kelby Tomlinson went back and forth between the minors and majors for most of the summer. Add it all up and, well, it wasn’t far from the truth if you said the Giants put a Triple-A team on the field at Miller Park on Saturday. The result, a **4-3 loss to the Brewers**, was predictable.

This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be, **but Buster Posey and Steven Duggar are done for the year**, Brandon Crawford and Brandon Belt have knee injuries, and Andrew McCutchen **is wearing pinstripes**. The Giants had just two players in the lineup Saturday who have spent the entire year in the big leagues: Evan Longoria and Gorkys Hernandez, and the latter was a backup once Duggar got going.

“You’re going to miss those guys,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “That’s the tough part of this game when those guys go down (but) you’ve got to move on. You have no choice. We’ve got a chance to look at some other guys and see where they’re at.”

On Saturday, that meant another start for Garcia, continued time for Slater, a debut for Avelino and pinch-hit appearances for Ryder Jones and Chris Shaw. Slater drove in the first run and Jones hit a two-run homer off the bench, adding to his resume.

It’ll be like this for the rest of the month. The Giants are winless in seven September games and they have 19 games to go, and you can bet Bochy will continue to mix and match.

Perhaps this won’t come as a surprise given all the injuries, but Bochy won’t have a single lineup take the field more than four times this season. Five different lineups have started together four times and three of them include Alen Hanson, a utility player. Bochy has used 105 total lineups this season, and he might not have the same one back-to-back the rest of the year.

On Saturday, that led to an overmatched group taking the field against a good Brewers team. The Giants fell to 0-5 on the road trip, but Bochy wasn’t looking for excuses.

“We can’t talk about what we don’t have,” he said.

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Giants notes: Ryder Jones makes most of pinch-hit opportunity**

**Alex Pavlovic**

MILWAUKEE — Ryder Jones made the most of a one-day cameo in Oakland **earlier this season**, hitting an impressive homer to right field. He appears ready to try to do the same with a September call-up.

On a night that looked like so many others this season, Jones gave the Giants a brief jolt by crushing a two-run shot to right-center off Joakim Soria. He got the Giants within one in the eighth, but the comeback fell short. The Giants lost 4-3 to the Brewers, **dropping a seventh straight**.

Manager Bruce Bochy would like his hitters to be more aggressive. Too many, he said, are going down looking. Jones put a ride into the first pitch he saw.

“He and [Chris] Shaw, they’ve got plus power,” Bochy said. “If they get ahold of it and it’s in the air, it’s going to go.”

Shaw hit a 468-foot homer at Coors Field. Jones is the king of exit velocity right now. Both of his home runs this season have left the yard at 112 mph, and he has two of the seven hardest-hit balls by a Giant this year despite playing just four games.

Bochy sent both Jones and Shaw up to pinch-hit late against a good Brewers bullpen. He said he wants to learn something about his young players, and not just in starting roles. Jones is blocked at first and third, but he’s still young and plenty talented enough to grab a significant bench role next season.

“Everybody here wants to be on the opening day roster next year,” he said. “You’re just trying to go out and do what you can and show your ability, be aggressive and help the team.”

--- Bochy had a choice to make in the eighth. With right-hander Jeremy Jeffress on the mound and the tying run in scoring position, he let Hunter Pence hit with two outs. Brandon Belt could have replaced Pence, but he was on deck to hit for Aramis Garcia. Pence struck out.

“If you look at Hunter he’s gotten some big hits in that situation,” Bochy said. “He’s got a knack for finding a way to come through. He had a nice hit earlier in the game and is in the flow of the game. He’s a veteran that wants to be in that situation and that’s part of it.”

To be fair, when Belt did hit in the ninth, he struck out.

--- The Giants are still looking for a pitcher with 10 wins. Chris Stratton gave up four runs in five

innings, falling to 9-9.

--- Abiatal Avelino struck out twice in his big league debut, although one was a Phil Cuzzi Special. He also showed off a weird pre-at-bat routine.

[twitter.com/PavlovicNBCS/status/1038572010916524033](https://twitter.com/PavlovicNBCS/status/1038572010916524033)

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Giants lose season-high seventh straight as late rally falls short  
Alex Pavlovic**

MILWAUKEE — Some of the Giants have spent the past two days talking about a team hotel that's supposedly haunted. What's happening on the field this past week is scarier.

The Giants lost 4-3 to the Brewers, continuing a winless road trip. They have lost a season-high seven straight and they're a season-high seven games under .500.

This one started slow, but the Giants twice had chances to get the tying run across in the final two innings. They failed to do so. Here's what you need to know from the second night in Milwaukee...

— Chris Stratton gave up four total runs in his first three starts back. He matched that in five innings Saturday. Stratton allowed a solo homer to Travis Shaw in the first, two more runs in the fourth, and another solo shot by Christian Yelich in the fifth.

— Ryder Jones got the Giants within one in the eighth, smoking the first pitch he saw from Joakim Soria into the seats in right. Jones' second homer of the year left the yard at 112 mph. His first homer was also hit 112. Jones, who has played four games this year, has two of the seven hardest-hit balls of the year by the Giants.

— The Giants got the tying run to third after Jones' homer, but Jeremy Jeffress blew 95 mph past Hunter Pence to end the inning.

— Kelby Tomlinson, a late addition to the lineup because Brandon Belt has a sore knee, was caught stealing second base in the first inning. That snapped a streak of 17 consecutive stolen bases for the Giants that was their longest in 11 years.

— Abiatal Avelino played six innings in his big league debut. Avelino, **acquired for Andrew McCutchen**, struck out twice before giving way to pinch-hitter Alen Hanson. He swung through

an 88 mph fastball at the letters to end his first at-bat and got rung up on an outside pitch in his second at-bat (Phil Cuzzi is **going to Phil Cuzzi.**)

## **The Athletic**

### **Greased slide: Another road loss underscores Giants' need to develop power from within** **Andrew Baggarly**

MILWAUKEE — There is a sign posted on the white board in the visiting clubhouse at Miller Park, nestled up against the lineup sheet and the bus times. It blares its warning in bright red letters:

“ACCESS TO THE YELLOW SLIDE (LEADING TO BERNIE’S DUGOUT) IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. ACCESS CANNOT BE GRANTED BY CLUBHOUSE STAFF. TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED AND CLUB GENERAL MANAGERS WILL BE NOTIFIED.”

No, really. This exists. The Milwaukee Brewers and their management truly want you to know that it’s not OK to joy slide in their ballpark.

Let’s back up a moment. If you’ve attended a Major League Baseball game in Milwaukee, you might remember the old slide at County Stadium. You also might remember that the club’s mascot, Bernie Brewer, would slide down it and disappear into a giant beer stein whenever the home team hit one out of the park. The most endearing part of the effect: the white balloons that lofted into the air, representing a splash of suds.

When the Brewers built their new ballpark with its retractable roof, they set aside their franchise motif and created a version of the slide that would pass muster with the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement. Bernie now has a longer, bright yellow slide that looks like it was unbolted and pilfered in the dead of night from the local water park. He lands on a platform (the heretofore mentioned Bernie’s dugout, as poorly as that term would seem to apply for a midair structure), and waves an enormous flag.

The warning sign is posted in the visiting clubhouse because of the actions of one former player, and yes, he happened to be a Giant, and you better believe we’re naming names here. It was J.T. Snow who took the infamous joy slide during the Brewers’ grand opening season in 2001, sneaking his way onto the upper platform and going down fanny first while the Brewers were on the field taking batting practice. “I like roller coasters and things like that and I decided to get a thrill out of it,” Snow told the Chicago Tribune. “We only come in here one time this year. I figured I’d get to see what Bernie feels like. It seems like he’ll be sliding down a lot with all the home runs flying out.”

[View image on Twitter](#)

This odd little slice of baseball lore might seem like a roundabout way to lead into the Giants’ 4-3 loss here Saturday night, except ... well, yes, Miller Park remains a hitter-friendly

environment. The home runs do fly out here. But for the Giants over the past two-plus seasons, the more hitter-friendly the ballpark, the less friendly it's been to them.

The Giants did receive a two-run pinch homer from Ryder Jones that tightened matters in the eighth inning. But the result was their seventh consecutive loss and their 11th defeat in their last 13 road games.

The Giants went 1-8 at Coors Field (and 1-9 last season). They were swept in Cincinnati. Now they must win behind Madison Bumgarner on Sunday to avoid the same fate in Milwaukee, as well as a total skunking on this road trip to play the Rockies and Brewers.

Something significant has to change with the Giants roster and lineup this offseason, because it's been 2 1/2 years now, and they simply do not have enough consistent extra-base power to compete outside of the neutralizing dimensions at China Basin. And nowhere is that more apparent than when they step in a hitter's haven.

Their road series record now stands at 6-14-4, and sure, that is twice as many road series as they won last season. That's not much of a consolation, though, is it?

By now, the popular complaints about the Giants' personnel and their direction and their management have been stated and restated and put through the food mill enough times that you could drink it with a straw. But let's dispense with one of them, OK?

No, it is not imperative that the Giants move in the fences at AT&T Park.

They have competed well at home. Their series record there is 12-5-5. In the best of times, their home record was the best or near to the best in the major leagues. If they can point to any legitimate progress this season, aside from developing useful major league parts in Dereck Rodríguez, Reyes Moronta, Ray Black, Andrew Suárez and Steven Duggar, it's that they straightened out last year's inability to win at home.

But then you remember: the Giants were also at their best when they could not only compete, but thrive on the road. Or did you forget that their three World Series titles were clinched in the balmy night air in Texas, in a chilled environment in Detroit and amid a frenzied Game 7 atmosphere in Kansas City?

Yes, the dimensions at AT&T Park make it tough to sign free-agent hitters. That perception really does exist, and is not a figment of Brian Sabean's imagination. But go ahead and scan the list of marquee free-agent hitters this winter. Aside from Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, who is not a positional fit, is there really a difference-maker out there? The Giants might find a complementary piece via free agency who can add more power to their lineup. But becoming a more attractive destination for free-agent hitters is not a compelling reason to move in the fences. It's not going to fix their issues.

If anything, the Giants' home dimensions have been an asset, not a liability.

But putting all that aside, the Giants still have to figure out how to refashion a lineup that can win in places like Colorado and Cincinnati and Milwaukee. And a big part of that will be to develop hitters who can make the transition to the big leagues.

That is why manager Bruce Bochy was so encouraged to see Jones come off the bench and swing at a first-pitch changeup over the plate.

“That’s what you want these kids doing — come up swinging the bat,” Bochy said. “It’s something we could be better at. ... I’m good with how they kept going because it was a tough night in the early go. They’re trying. But at times, I think we could be a bit more aggressive. You get a good pitch early, let (the bat) go.”

Bochy agreed with the premise of a question that the Giants have taken far too many called third strikes this season, and it’s hard to digest those comments without taking them as an oblique reference to Brandon Belt.

Belt was hitting .307 with a .950 OPS and 11 home runs through 58 games, when a June 1 appendectomy sent him to the disabled list. He is hitting .211 with three home runs and a .594 OPS in 54 games since then. A troublesome knee, which required a stint on the disabled list, didn’t help matters.

The knee made him a late scratch from Saturday’s lineup, but he was available off the bench. Bochy had pitcher Derek Holland ready to pinch-run for him if the need arose.

But when the Giants had two on and two out in the eighth inning, Belt did not pinch-hit for Hunter Pence. Instead, he stood in the on deck circle, ready to pinch-hit for rookie catcher Aramis García.

For those fans who criticize Bochy for being too reliant on declining veterans, and not supportive enough of younger players, it almost seemed like a thumb to the eye. Would Bochy pinch-hit for a young kid who already hit two homers in his first three games? But not a faded star who is playing out the last days of his contract?

This was the manager’s rationale:

“If you look at Hunter, he’s gotten some big hits, too,” Bochy said. “That’s Hunter. He’s got a knack for finding a way to come through. He had a nice hit earlier in the game. He’s in the flow of the game. He’s a veteran who wants to be in that situation, and that’s part of it.”

Pence struck out swinging against Brewers right-hander Jeremy Jeffress, and the Giants failed to take the lead. But before you file suit for that eye-gouging, it might help to be reminded that Belt, when he led off the ninth against Jeffress, struck out looking.

Bochy didn’t need to say it: he wanted someone up there who would be ready to swing the bat.

It’s not as if he is completely averse to playing a matchup with a young player over a veteran. With the Giants down to their final out against Jeffress in the ninth, he went with left-handed hitting rookie Chris Shaw over Gorkys Hernández. He chose a rookie with a week of big league experience over the team’s home run leader.

Shaw worked a walk before Gregor Blanco flied out to end it.

“They hit it in the air, it’ll go,” Bochy said of Shaw and Jones. “You watch their BP. They’re only going to get better. It’s something we need here, the power. ...

Even coming off the bench, it could be a role for some of those guys.”

Shaw, judging by the strikeouts that are piling up like cordwood, clearly isn't ready to thrive against big league pitching yet. Jones, no matter what he does this month, will not position himself for an everyday role to open next season. The Giants are not walling themselves off from the possibility of either player forcing his way into that kind of role — Mac Williamson, as long a road as he had traveled, was poised to do the same thing before his concussion in late April — but it's clear they will not design their roster this winter and pencil either player into the everyday lineup.

The same probably won't be true for Duggar, the center fielder who showed such a blend of skills and confidence that the Giants will feel good about the position without adding to their depth there over the winter.

But Duggar's season-ending shoulder surgery was a clear setback for this offense as it is currently constituted. So was the trade that sent Andrew McCutchen to the Yankees. Those two brought dynamism, which is what you need to score runs if you aren't going to hit homers. And at a time when the league is scoring more than 40 percent of its runs on homers, the Giants have trotted home just 33.5 percent of the time.

Now the Giants are neither dynamic nor particularly potent.

“We won't talk about what we don't have,” Bochy said. “Some guys are getting a chance to show what they can do here.”

Whether they get it through patience or aggression, or from rookies or veterans, or even from Bumgarner, who clanked a ball way up and off Bernie's Dugout in batting practice the other day, the Giants must harvest more power to compete in these liveliest spots in the National League.

A failure to do so will lead to one thing: the kind of slide that nobody wants to fathom.

## **The Athletic**

**As the Giants prepare to renovate their roster, two impending free agents are looking more and more indispensable**

**Andrew Baggarly**

MILWAUKEE — Nick Hundley is too smart, too poised, too emotionally disciplined to lose his temper on a baseball field.

When he stands up out of his crouch to confront a preening batter like Yasiel Puig, as he did last month at Dodger Stadium, or he swipes the dirt with a cleat to express frustration with an umpire, as he did to draw an ejection Friday night at Miller Park, those are not impulsive acts. They are calculated, premeditated and performed with a specific purpose in mind.

Usually, that purpose goes something like this: “I'm not going to let you disrespect my team.”



Yes, the Giants are still Hundley's team. Perhaps more than ever, now that Buster Posey is on crutches following hip surgery. Perhaps less than ever, now that Hundley will be a free agent in a few short weeks.

The Giants are still Derek Holland's team, too, even though free agency beckons for him as well.

It's a strange concept, isn't it? The Giants have so many players locked up to long-term contracts, so little flexibility when it comes to future money committed, and there's been so much talk of this team's core and the questionable efficacy of continuing to build around familiar faces. The Giants need a roster refresh. They need new faces.

Yet two of their players who are about to hit the open market have also become two of the players they can least afford to lose.

The Giants are optimistic that Posey will come in on the early side of that six- to eight-month recovery estimate and be ready to catch on opening day. But re-signing Hundley, a rare backup who can still handle everyday duties if necessary, figures to be a top priority.

The Giants are optimistic that Dereck Rodríguez and Andrew Suárez can hold down rotation spots next season, with Chris Stratton at least providing depth. But with Johnny Cueto out for the year, and Jeff Samardzija's status unclear, and the upper levels of the minor league system already cleared out (even prospect Shaun Anderson could be introduced in a relief role, Brian Sabean said on KNBR), augmenting their rotation will be a priority as well.

Yet given all the work the Giants must do to rebuild a functioning offense, and given all the money they've already committed to their starting five, and given the approaching end of Madison Bumgarner's club-friendly contract after next season, it's hard to imagine that the Giants will throw wads of cash at top free-agent pitchers like Dallas Keuchel, Charlie Morton or Patrick Corbin this winter.

So Holland fits from every angle. He has done everything possible to earn an invitation to return — and at a generous but perhaps reasonable raise from his current \$1.75 million salary.

Asked about whether he is viewing each remaining start as an audition for next season, Holland respectfully cut off the questioner.

"I don't want to look at contract talk, none of that stuff," he said. "I need to focus on now. I have, you know, personal goals that I want to achieve but if I start worrying about that stuff, excuse my language, but it's going to fuck everything for me. I need to worry about what's going on now"

There's no question the Giants have received maximum value this season from Holland, who gave up a two-run home run to Ryan Braun but allowed just one other hit in six tidy innings. He has a 3.54 ERA in 31 games (27 starts). He leads the team with 152 2/3 innings. His 7.8 hits per nine innings is the lowest rate of his career. And he isn't getting by on guile, either.

"He threw well, and he's been throwing well," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "He's got good stuff and that's where it starts. He's competed well for us all year."

Holland and Hundley formed a successful battery Friday night, and yet the Giants lost another road game. The bullpen surrendered the two difference-making runs in the seventh inning of their 4-2 defeat to the Milwaukee Brewers, but it was another loss that bore so many familiar markings.

In the liveliest of ballparks, the Giants' aching and overmatched lineup has been unable to keep pace. It's why they lost eight of nine at Coors Field. It's why they got swept in Cincinnati, scoring just six runs in three games against the most combustible pitching staff in the National League. It's why, on a Friday night in America's Dairyland, the Giants lineup went down faster than a cold bottle of Spotted Cow.

They did not go down easily, though.

Hundley erased the chalk line and yelled at plate umpire Adam Hamari after a called third strike on a borderline curveball in the ninth inning. Hundley's reaction had more to do with the fourth inning, when Hamari called an egregious strike on a 3-0 pitch that otherwise would have loaded the bases with nobody out.

Hundley popped up. The Giants did not score.

"That was probably one of the worst strike calls I had on me in my career," Hundley said. "It's probably the most inconsistent strike zone I've seen all year. The frustration builds up when the bat's taken out of your hands late in the game. ... It was extremely inconsistent, and you can write it however you want from there."

Hundley could speak his mind freely after the game because he knew he'd already put himself in the fine box. Hamari ejected him in the ninth, and Bochy followed when he quick-stepped it onto the field and likely dropped the magic word he saves for just these occasions.

Hundley said the call on the 3-0 pitch in the fourth made it "100 percent, a completely different game. It's a 3-0 pitch that's a good 8 inches outside, not exaggerating. No outs, bases loaded, it's a completely, completely different game. But that's what we got today."

Baseball is not a study in sliding doors. Both teams had to contend with an inconsistent strike zone, just as both teams in Colorado must contend with the altitude and hitting conditions. Ultimately, it's no excuse.

But there's only so much you can take lying down.

"That's what that was — total frustration, and losing the ballgame added to it," Bochy said. "These guys, they care."

It's why Bochy loves to watch Bumgarner take the mound every fifth day. It's what he appreciates most about Hundley. It's their competitive fire that Bochy wants his younger players to see. He wants them to understand how much this matters.

That's especially true now that the Giants are out of contention, and heading toward a losing record.

The Giants had spent all season locked in the gravitational pull of the .500 mark, unable to sustain enough momentum with a bruised roster to break away.

They've broken free now. Everything becomes untethered when you're in a downward spiral.

Hunter Strickland started the seventh inning with two walks and Tony Watson allowed a two-run double to Jesús Aguilar, continuing an extremely turbulent second half, as the Giants lost their sixth consecutive game. The defeat also left them with a 68-74 record – the first time all season that they are not within five games, plus or minus, of .500.

It would be easy to check out. Hundley has not checked out. Holland praised him for the time he's spent with rookie catcher Aramis García and for the way he's taken younger players under his wing.

"He's a very passionate player and he wants to win every game," Holland said. "It's great to see a guy as vocal as he is take a leadership role on his team. He's one of the best teammates I've ever had. He's our backup catcher, but he comes in every day like he's the starter. I love how he carries himself."

## **Baseball America**

### **Top 10 Major League Ballparks**

#### **Matt Eddy**

The Baseball America team of major league correspondents and columnists spend countless days at major league ballparks all across the country each year. So who better to dish on which ballparks are best and what elevates them above the field?

Many correspondents gravitated toward the undisputed classics—Fenway Park, Wrigley Field and Dodger Stadium—because of the pull of history. Those parks have hosted a combined 27 World Series and have played home to more than a dozen Hall of Famers through the decades. Therefore, we didn't think it fair to compare them with parks with much shorter histories.

But don't worry: We give Fenway, Wrigley and Dodger their own spotlight below.

#### **1. AT&T Park, San Francisco**

Opened: 2000

Two-thirds of respondents chose the Giants' home field as the best in the business. That practically counts as a unanimous decision in such a subjective task as ranking ballparks. AT&T Park turns a disadvantage—a tight footprint butted up against the San Francisco Bay—into an advantage with a creative ballpark design and unparalleled water view.

*"It's easy to stroll around the park, and worthwhile, too, since the Giants provide so much to look at inside the park—artifacts, history, etc. And that's totally apart from its incredible setting and view! Tremendous food options (toasted ravioli!), and each vantage point has something different to offer. Only the name is bad." —Phil Miller (Twins)*

*"Baseball, garlic fries and the big glove. Good sight lines for the fans and a fun experience." —Casey Tefertiller (Athletics)*

*"Beautiful location in a unique city with different energy, big crowds and great music." —Patrick Mooney (Cubs)*

## **2. PNC Park, Pittsburgh**

Opened: 2001

Fans waited until the park's 13th year to see a winning Pirates team, but perhaps the "most picturesque backdrop imaginable," according to D-backs correspondent Nick Piecoro, helped dull the pain.

*"The visuals are off the charts—I'm ignoring the high level of the press box as a negative—with the downtown view and the Clemente bridge. It's just so well done. PNC is an attractive park put exactly where it belonged." —Tom Haudricourt (Brewers)*

## **3. Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore**

Opened: 1992

The Orioles kicked off the retro ballpark boom with a new classic. "The oldest of the new age was done right," Athletics correspondent Casey Tefertiller said.

*"A very intimate stadium. The warehouse in right field is timeless, and it has the best press box view in baseball, but beware: foul balls come in often, and fast." —Anthony Fenech (Tigers)*

## **4. Safeco Field, Seattle**

Opened: 1999

A modern park with an old-school feel, the Mariners' home has aged well, complete with its retractable roof that is essential for Pacific Northwest weather.

*"Another relaxed atmosphere, and probably the best food and beverage menu in the game. I'm a sucker for the drizzly-day ambiance, where the game goes on anyway under the roof. Fan-friendly to the extreme." —Phil Miller (Twins)*

## **5. Petco Park, San Diego**

Opened: 2004

An aesthetically pleasing park set in fantastic baseball weather grants the Padres significant home-field advantage.

*“Just one of those great downtown parks. They put it in such a cool place, with the attached warehouse building. Just a visually pleasing park in a visually pleasing place.” —Tom Haudricourt (Brewers)*

## **6. Coors Field, Denver**

Opened: 1995

The outfield is huge at the Rockies’ home field, and so too is the club’s popularity with fans, judging from attendance history.

*“Spotless park, great food, and they’re always adding features that make for a good fan experience. The brewery in the building is a tremendous place to visit before games, and the BBQ is pretty great, too. I wish it was a little easier to get to, but the light rail has helped.” —Phil Miller (Twins)*

## **7. Target Field, Minneapolis**

Opened: 2010

One of baseball’s northernmost franchises, the Twins moved from the climate-controlled Metrodome to open-air Target Field, and the move has been met with rave reviews.

*“Target Field is one of the first modern parks. It’s not trying to cash in nostalgia but creating its own legacy. It benefits from a downtown setting and beautiful Minnesota summers. It has wide concourses and great views of the playing field.” —C. Trent Rosecrans (Reds)*

## **8. Kauffman Stadium, Kansas City, Mo.**

Opened: 1973

The Royals’ home field is an overlooked classic with good bones and a unique water feature in right-center field. An extensive 2006 renovation helped modernize “The K” with wider concourses and a huge hi-def scoreboard.

*“Kauffman shows what the cookie-cutters got wrong, making a wonderful palace for baseball. Again, it has wide concourses, great sight lines and a pretty backdrop.” —C. Trent Rosecrans (Reds)*

## **9. Citi Field, New York**

Opened: 2009

The Mets upgraded more than the home run apple when they moved across the parking lot from Shea Stadium nearly a decade ago.

*“I don’t think this place gets talked about often enough. I like the way they blended old and new. They have good sight lines all around the concourse—and they’ve got a Shake Shack in center field.” —Nick Piecoro (D-backs)*

## **10. Progressive Field, Cleveland**

Opened: 1994

The Indians replaced “The Mistake By The Lake” with this beloved new classic, ushering in an era of sustained on-field success in Cleveland.

*“Progressive deserves its spot for its open feel, the fact that it’s centrally located downtown, has the biggest video screen in MLB, and for the Indians’ Heritage Park hall of fame in center field.” —Scout for an AL team*

---

## **A League Of Their Own**

“For me, the greatest ballpark experience is being able to walk from the present into the past,” Athletics correspondent Casey Tefertiller said. “So it is only natural that my favorite parks would be the old ones.”

Other correspondents echoed those sentiment, so we knew we had to create a separate category for the undisputed classics, those parks that opened before the six-division format, before free agency, before the DH, before expansion took hold.

Pirates correspondent Dustin Dopirak eloquently distills the charm of the three holiest baseball cathedrals.

## **Fenway Park, Boston**

Opened: 1912

World Series: 11 (spanning 1912 to 2013)

Red Sox Hall of Famers Through The Years: Joe Cronin, Ted Williams, Carl Yastzemski, Wade Boggs, Pedro Martinez

“I give Fenway the slight edge (over Wrigley Field) because of the uniqueness of the field itself—The Green Monster, Pesky’s Pole, the notch out in center field—and because it’s kept in a little bit better shape. (Pirates manager) Clint Hurdle called it a “living museum” when the Pirates opened there last year. Not sure there’s any way I could say it better.”

## **Wrigley Field, Chicago**

Opened: 1914

World Series: 7 (spanning 1918 to 2016)

Cubs Hall of Famers Through The Years: Gabby Hartnett, Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, Ferguson Jenkins, Ryne Sandberg

“The view of Lake Michigan from the Wrigley press box is pretty spectacular. The one area I would say Wrigley has the edge over Fenway is the surrounding neighborhood. Nothing wrong with the Fens, but the ballpark fits so naturally in Wrigleyville.”

### **Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles**

Opened: 1962

World Series: 9 (spanning 1963 to 2017)

Dodgers Hall of Famers Through The Years: Duke Snider, Sandy Koufax, Don Drysdale, Don Sutton

“Not sure there’s a better monument to post-World War II westward expansionism than Dodger Stadium. I love the hexagonal signs scoreboards and the corrugated pavilion in the outfield. The view of the mountains is gorgeous and make up for the complete mess that is the parking situation (and L.A. traffic in general.) The park is worth just about every inconvenience.”

### **McCoveyChronicles.com**

#### **Why Hunter Pence should win the Willie Mac Award**

**Carmen Kiew**

With **Giants’** September baseball approaching its final destination (aka not the playoffs) and the actual baseball games being closer to “meh” than ever before, I want to look ahead to the Willie Mac Award, which is handed out on the last Friday home game of the season.

It’s probably one of my favorite days at the yard because it gives us insight into the clubhouse — this award is voted on primarily by the players, coaches, medical staff, etc. (with a small percentage of votes being tallied via fan votes) and goes to the player that “best exemplifies the spirit and leadership consistently shown by the San Francisco legend [Willie McCovey] throughout his career”. The plaque handed to the player says “Competitive Spirit, Ability and Leadership”.

In other words, this goes to the most inspirational player on the team. In recent years, the winners have been:

- **2017: Nick Hundley** (For being an all-around good guy, one of only eight players that have won in their first year as a Giant)

- **2016: Brandon Crawford/Javier Lopez** (two pillars in the clubhouse, Lopez the wise veteran who provided leadership, **Crawford** who had a great season on the field and played through injuries to bring the team to the postseason)
- **2015: Matt Duffy** (who won over the role as starting third base from veteran **Casey McGehee** and played almost every day that year)
- **2014: Madison Bumgarner** (Hello, it was 2014, Madison Bumgarner was literally a baseball monster who was impeccable)
- **2013: Hunter Pence** (For playing all 162 games with heart and hustle)
- **2012: Buster Posey** (Also, hello, 2012 **Buster Posey** basically won every award possible)
- **2011: Ryan Vogelsong** (For being the Giants' comeback player, making the all-star team, and being a bright spot after Posey's horrific ankle injury)
- **2010: Andres Torres** (For breaking out of his role as a journeyman into an impact player on a **World Series** team, and also, just being Andres Torres)

Some really wonderful and deserving people have won this award. There haven't been a lot of repeat winners, but **Bengie Molina** went back-to-back in 2007 and 2008 and so did Giants broadcaster Mike Krukow in 1985 and 1986. J.T Snow also won twice in non-consecutive years, in 1997 and then again in 2004.

From everything I've heard about this award, the guys in the clubhouse take it very seriously and try to look for teammates who really fit the bill when it comes to inspiration, leading by example, and leadership. And that brings me to the crux of this piece. I think **Hunter Pence** should win the Willie Mac Award this year.

Hunter Pence undoubtedly has had a rough season. He started as the every day left fielder, hurt his thumb, and spent significant time in the minor leagues. When he returned, he was primarily used off the bench, something the 12-year veteran had never done before in his career. As an athlete who is so driven that he played so hard he completely tore his right hamstring and played all 162 games in a season for two years straight, that had to be tough.

Despite his challenges, Pence still remains one of the driving forces of inspiration on this team. If you haven't checked out **this article** from KNBR, it will give you an idea of how his teammates and coaches feel about him. While his numbers are not what they used to be, the Willie Mac award celebrates more than just the impact on the field or what your exit velocity is. Pence is a prime example of how your vibes and energy can lift others up, and how a kind heart and spirit can inspire in a sport that can be described as a game of failure most days.

During the A's/Giants exhibition series before the beginning of the season, I was working late and hanging around to see which rookies had made the big league club and which ones were ultimately be sent to Sacramento to start the season. The bus was waiting outside to take the guys back.



After a lot of the regular guys had left and the rookies had finally boarded the bus, I thought everyone was gone. But then, Hunter emerged from the clubhouse. Turns out, he had stayed after the game to chat one-on-one with all the guys who didn't make the club, letting them know they didn't need to feel discouraged and to just keep going. He wanted them to know they were going to be okay.

When everyone has gone, the cameras have been turned off, and the scribes have stopped scribing, this is the core of who Hunter Pence is. Deeply caring, motivating, and *involved*. I honestly don't think he knows how to be any other way.

That's one anecdote that I just happened to catch but there's no doubt in my mind there are more. The Giants have seen their share of rookies this season, many of who spent time with Pence during his stint in triple-A during his rehab assignment.

When I went to **speak with Dereck Rodriguez** the day before his call-up, I asked him if it was nice to have veteran guys pass through and share their knowledge — he pointed immediately to Hunter, who has talked with him about pitching from the hitter's perspective.

While he's no longer the guy yelling and showering a postseason scrum with sunflower seeds, working with the younger guys, being at the top of the dugouts to celebrate a rookie's first home run even when that guy may be next in line to threaten his playing time in left field — these are things that I don't think should be overlooked when considering who would be qualified to win this award.

Finally, the writing is pretty much on the wall for next year, and as we approach the end of the season and Pence's five-year contract with the Giants, I can't think of a better send off than honoring Hunter with this award. Not only would this be a nice gesture to one of the most beloved players to ever wear the orange and black, but I think it would mean a lot to the fans to be able to bid Hunter farewell and thank him for everything he's done throughout the years — not just the obvious stuff like his on-field heroics, but also what he's done this season behind the scenes.

I think back to **Tim Lincecum's** last year with the Giants — another truly beloved player in San Francisco. While it was fairly obvious to everyone that Timmy wouldn't be coming back the following year, it felt awkward to say goodbye in a big way. So he legitimately disappeared, appearing only once in awhile like at the **Women's March** or in **Hawaii**, but never being able to look up into the crowd of 40,000 that loved him like a brother, and say goodbye to a city that he won championships with. If I could do it all over again, I would. I would do it with Hunter Pence while I still had the chance. And I would do it with the Willie Mac Award.

I know this is not an award that's taken lightly or given out "just because" a player might be leaving the organization, but I do believe Hunter Pence has exemplified the qualities specific to this award. I'm not a baseball player, but watching Hunter mentor younger guys, customize handshakes with the veterans he's been playing alongside for five seasons, and considering his charitable work off the field, I think there's a valid case to be made.

Oh, and no one gives a heartfelt speech like Hunter. If you haven't heard his 2013 Willie Mac Award acceptance speech, you should check out the **transcript**. My favorite part:

*I have two goals: To go hard and to love every minute of it. God, you didn't bless me with grace and very much style. But thank you for giving me heart and a chance.*

I don't know about you, but I want a Part II. I want to thank Hunter Pence and I want to give him a platform to say what's in his heart to the city that embraced his weird-o scooter-ridin', coffee-lovin' ways. A send-off from his teammates and the fans that would say "thank you for what you've done, playing like your hair was on fire every day, like your limbs were made from overcooked spaghetti, and for loving every person at AT&T Park — from your teammates to the coaches to the ushers to the fans — like they were part of your family".

Hunter Pence — he's got my vote.

## **ESPN.com**

### **MLB stock watch: What all 30 teams have to play for in September Bradford Doolittle**

The baseball season is long, and it also goes by pretty fast. It's hard to believe, but it has been nearly seven months since pitchers and catchers reported back in February. Everything that has happened since has pointed us toward what is shaping up as a great final month of the regular season. For today's Stock Watch, let's step back and make a holistic appraisal of what has transpired since those quiet Cactus and Grapefruit days. We've divided the teams into two groups: contenders and also-rans. We're calling any team that still has at least a 1 percent chance at the postseason in my latest run of simulations a contender, while acknowledging that for teams such as the Tampa Bay Rays and Washington Nationals, that might not be an apt description. That's 16 teams; the other 14 clubs comprise the also-ran class.

Alongside each team's current win forecast and percentage shot at the playoffs, we're listing how much those measurements have shifted since the last time we ran the simulations back in spring training. Within each class (contenders and also-rans), teams are ordered by their change

in win forecast.

Along with the metrics, we're going to weigh in on just what each team has to play for during the last month of regular-season play in 2018.

## CONTENDERS

### Oakland Athletics

**Current win forecast:** 96.4 (change from spring: +20.2)

**Current playoff probability:** 92.2 percent (up 75.2 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 2.2 percent

The A's don't have the benefit of anymore head-to-head encounters with the first-place Astros, so Oakland's run at the AL West title will depend on them beating other teams and getting help elsewhere. It's a scenario any A's fan would have embraced back in spring training. While Bob Melvin is the likely favorite for AL Manager of the Year, you don't hear us talk much about Oakland players in the postseason conversation. I'm not quite ready to back Blake Treinen for the Cy Young, but it could happen. Matt Chapman isn't in the middle of the MVP conversation, but he's in the ring circling it. The top rookie has been Lou Trivino, and how many fans outside of the Bay Area know about him? Yet all of these people and more are worth watching on what is a very entertaining team. Chapman is a nightly thrill to watch play defense at the hot corner, and rookie center fielder Ramon Laureano puts on a show with his arm. The question isn't why you would watch the A's, but why wouldn't you?

---

### Boston Red Sox

**Current win forecast:** 109.1 (change from spring: +17.0)

**Current playoff probability:** 100 percent (up 36 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 19.0 percent

Boston has a 9.5-game edge over Houston in the race for the No. 1 AL playoff seed. Barring a collapse that would revisit 1978-style horrors, the Red Sox should cruise into the postseason with home-field advantage locked up for however long they last in October. This month is

about setting up the pitching staff for October. That begins with getting Chris Sale and David Price healthy. Then, after that, we'll be watching to see if Nathan Eovaldi can overtake Eduardo Rodriguez in the battle for Boston's last playoff rotation spot.

---

### **Atlanta Braves**

**Current win forecast:** 89.3 (change from spring: +15.7)

**Current playoff probability:** 82.1 percent (up 67.1 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 4.5 percent

The Braves are well positioned in the NL East race, though it's close enough that one week can flip everything upside down. Atlanta has not been playing particularly well over the past couple of weeks, relying on late-inning magic to maintain its edge over the Phillies. Even so, Atlanta has split its past 20 games. After finishing their current home series against the powerhouse Red Sox, the Braves head out for a seven-game trip out west. Even though Philadelphia has been sliding, don't forget that the Braves and Phillies still have seven games head-to-head remaining, including a three-game set at Citizens Bank Park to finish the regular season.

---

### **Milwaukee Brewers**

**Current win forecast:** 92.5 (change from spring: +12.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 94.1 percent (up 63.1 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 2.9 percent

Remember 2017? It was last year, so if you don't, you should probably seek medical attention. The Brewers entered last season to low external expectations but got off to a .500-ish start, worked their way up to first place and remained there into the second half of the season, before hanging in the playoff race into late September. Here are the players on the opening day roster of that Brew Crew team who are still on Milwaukee's active roster: Ryan Braun, Keon Broxton, Hernan Perez, Travis Shaw, Manny Pina, Eric Thames, Jesus Aguilar, Orlando Arcia, Zach Davies, Chase Anderson, Corey Knebel and Jacob Barnes -- less than half the current squad. Brewers GM David Stearns has stayed aggressive throughout this two-year push into

contention, remaking the club with one small upgrade after another (except for the big Christian Yelich/Lorenzo Cain-sized upgrades). This month is when we find out how it all works out. But the Brewers are a better team now than they were a month go, two months ago, and at any point last season. You can't say they haven't tried.

---

## **Seattle Mariners**

**Current win forecast:** 89.4 (change from spring: +8.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 5.8 percent (down 22.2 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Either the Mariners are coming apart or they decided to stage a reenactment of the intramural brawl scene from "Major League." Alas, literal infighting is not a thing the fans can watch if it's happening behind closed clubhouse doors. Either the M's should install cameras in the clubhouse and beam those matches onto the video board, or they should just stage them out on the field during batting practice. They might win over a few Seahawks fans. As for actual baseball, the Mariners' playoff hopes are almost zilch, but closer Edwin Diaz still has a shot at setting a new saves record. Saves aren't something I get too excited over, but a record is a record. Diaz has saved 52 of Seattle's 77 wins, which even I have to admit is pretty remarkable.

---

## **Colorado Rockies**

**Current win forecast:** 87.0 (change from spring: +8.8)

**Current playoff probability:** 38.7 percent (up 17.7 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.9 percent

Whatever I might say about the Rockies' negative run differential, lack of roster depth, or their 29th-or-worse bWAR ranking at four different positions, none of it erases this factoid: As I type these words, the Rockies are in first place in the NL West. They have two position players who have been top-20 performers this season in Trevor Story and Nolan Arenado. They have a legit rotation paced by two guys -- German Marquez and Kyle Freeland -- who are rolling. And the Rockies' beleaguered bullpen has been a little better of late. The Rockies are at home until Sept. 13, playing division foes, taking on the Giants, Dodgers and Diamondbacks in order. They then

hit the road to play those same three teams on the road. As good as Colorado's position is right now, it feels like if they don't make good on the current homestand, their season's story will be told more by those shaky underlying metrics than that lofty standing on Labor Day. Buckle up, Rockies fans.

---

### **Tampa Bay Rays**

**Current win forecast:** 88.2 (change from spring: +8.3)

**Current playoff probability:** 3.8 percent (down 20.2 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.1 percent

The thing is, I didn't think the Rays would be bad this season and certainly never thought they should have been lumped in with teams that some labeled as "tankers" -- a term I can't abide. I thought Tampa Bay would be perfectly mediocre. And they were, too, before the front office decided to jettison veterans Corey Dickerson, Steven Souza Jr., Chris Archer, Adeiny Hechavarria and Wilson Ramos. Then they got even better. Since July 31, the Rays have gone from 53-53 (mediocre!) to 74-63 (hey, that's pretty good). There are lots of reasons to watch this team play, even in a hellish venue like the Trop. Jake Bauers' emerging bat. The intensity of Tommy Pham. The outfield acrobatics of Kevin Kiermaier. The infield wizardry of Joey Wendle. But at the very least, tune in when Blake Snell takes the mound. No opener needed on his days. Snell has a good chance to win 20 games on a team trying to make starting pitchers as obsolete as my old portable CD player. Over his past 11 outings, Snell has been deGrom-like, only with winning decisions. He's 9-1 during that stretch, with a 1.26 ERA.

---

### **Philadelphia Phillies**

**Current win forecast:** 84.5 (change from spring: +3.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 18.3 percent (down 11.7 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.1 percent

I've probably been a little hard on the Phillies lately because I haven't been a big fan of their approach to in-season upgrades. However, in my roster value ratings, only the Braves have increased theirs more since spring training than the Phillies have. Philadelphia ranked in the

bottom five at catcher all season before acquiring Wilson Ramos; now they're ninth. The rotation has jumped from 16th to eighth, though the biggest leap in that area came during spring training, when Jake Arrieta signed on. The bullpen has jumped from 25th in my initial 2018 ratings to ninth. So this is clearly a deeper, more talented roster. The Phillies are intelligently run, in the front office and from the dugout. Nevertheless, I can't understand how when you have a weakness as glaring as the Phillies' MLB-worst defense that you can't shore up that aspect to some degree. It's there in the advanced metrics (minus-115 defensive runs saved, per Baseball Info Solutions, ranked 30th) and it's there in the old-school stats (tied for most errors, MLB-low fielding percentage and fourth-most unearned runs).

---

## **New York Yankees**

**Current win forecast:** 99.1 (change from spring: +2.5)

**Current playoff probability:** 98.3 percent (up 22.3 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 5.0 percent

The formula for this year's Yankees was supposed to be a powerhouse offense plus a fire-breathing bullpen plus a decent starting rotation. With J.A. Happ and Lance Lynn performing well, the rotation part of the formula now seems to be there. The bullpen has fallen a bit short of expectations and now may be without Aroldis Chapman for the rest of the season. But it's still a strong group and a strength heading into the postseason, even if Chapman can't go. The offense has also been mostly as advertised. The Yankees are on pace to hit 264 homers, which would match the 1997 Mariners as the most ever by a team. The Yankees are on pace to score 837 runs, second in baseball behind Boston. They've also been consistent offensively, even though they've been more dependent on the long ball for run scoring than any other team. Yet it just doesn't feel like it has all come together. New York has won five of 10 and 12 of 20 coming out of a soft spot on the schedule. Can the Yanks play up to their considerable potential by the time the playoffs come around?

---

## Houston Astros

**Current win forecast:** 101.8 (change from spring: +2.0)

**Current playoff probability:** 99.9 percent (up 18.9 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 32.3 percent

With the Indians easing up and the Red Sox on cruise control, the Astros only have to concern themselves with the race they figured to have wrapped up before the season even began: the AL West title. Little by little, the Astros have gotten their key position players back, and during Houston's current 10-3 run, they've averaged 5.3 runs per game. Now the injury focus moves to the pitching staff, where Charlie Morton and Lance McCullers Jr. are on the shelf and Hector Rondon just took a line drive off his pitching hand. With a soft finishing schedule beyond this weekend's epic clash with Boston at Fenway Park, Houston should still land comfortably into the No. 2 slot in the AL bracket. Unfortunately for Oakland, the A's won't be able to make up ground head-to-head: Those division foes won't see each other again during the regular season.

---

## Arizona Diamondbacks

**Current win forecast:** 85.1 (change from spring: +2.0)

**Current playoff probability:** 20.2 percent (down 16.8 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.9 percent

If the Diamondbacks earn a postseason spot, they will have *really* earned it. The aggregate power rating of Arizona's remaining opponents is 92.6. That means the typical opponent from here on out is roughly the Oakland Athletics. The second-highest remaining schedule rating in baseball belongs to Toronto, at 89.7, so it's not particularly close. The Diamondbacks have been treading water for weeks now, going 26-24 over their last 50 games. Given the gauntlet that lies ahead, they'll have to be better than that persistent mediocrity to play on in October.

---



## St. Louis Cardinals

**Current win forecast:** 88.8 (change from spring: +0.6)

**Current playoff probability:** 64.7 percent (up 10.7 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 1.9 percent

The Cardinals were a good but underperforming team earlier this season under Mike Matheny. They're now playing up to their talent level, which may or may not have happened under Matheny, but the work of Mike Shildt has certainly not hurt -- thus his interim tag is gone. Still, as well as Shildt has done, we'll tune in to watch all those kids who have sparked St. Louis' surge into contention. Tyler O'Neill is a physical marvel -- his father was a world-class body builder -- and is producing with the bat and the glove. Harrison Bader may be the best defensive outfielder in the league. He's a fringe NL Rookie of the Year candidate, though his WAR numbers are a bit inflated by swollen defensive metrics that people don't completely buy. And don't forget about the young pitchers -- Jack Flaherty, Luke Weaver, Daniel Ponce de Leon, Jordan Hicks and Dakota Hudson. The Cardinal Way is back.

---

## Chicago Cubs

**Current win forecast:** 93.9 (change from spring: +0.0)

**Current playoff probability:** 97.0 percent (up 27 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 10.6 percent

Until Monday's tough loss at Milwaukee, the Cubs were the hottest team in the National League. (Kris Bryant should probably have thrown home.) That distinction then belonged to the Brewers, and it could change nightly from here on out. As well as the Cubs have played over the second half, they still haven't put a stranglehold on the Central, much less the league as a whole. By my measure of offensive consistency, only the Nationals have been more volatile this season than the Cubs. Now that Bryant and Addison Russell are back to join newcomer Daniel Murphy, we'll see if Chicago can climb off that roller coaster. If they do, the Cubs will enter the postseason as the clear-cut pennant favorites in the senior circuit.

---

## Cleveland Indians

**Current win forecast:** 91.9 (change from spring: -4.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 100.0 percent (up 22 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 7.7 percent

It looked ever so briefly like the Indians were about to go on a 2017-like tear. They were playing well, had several players angling for postseason awards and had a soft, AL Central-heavy schedule ahead of them. From Aug. 13 to Aug. 26, the Tribe maintained a team temperature over 100 degrees. They've since dropped eight of 12, and that temperature is down to 65 degrees -- officially in "cold" territory. This is concerning. The Cleveland bullpen, which hasn't been that good this year but seemed to have all the pieces to coalesce by October, is still struggling for consistency. Jose Ramirez and Francisco Lindor have cooled. Trevor Bauer and Andrew Miller are on the disabled list. Meanwhile, the Indians are two games under .500 outside of their division. Cleveland still looks like a loaded team on paper. The Indians have one more month to play like one before they enter into a treacherous AL playoff bracket.

---

## **Los Angeles Dodgers**

**Current win forecast:** 89.6 (change from spring: -6.4)

**Current playoff probability:** 75.4 percent (up 0.4 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 11.6 percent

I was reading the Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract and came across one of his essays on what might constitute the greatest team ever. It's not the 2018 Dodgers -- don't think I'm headed down that road. However, one of the possible criteria James mentioned was a team that was above average at every position. Well, this year's Dodgers rank in the top 10 in bWAR at every position on the field except two -- in the bullpen and at second base. Since the additions of Manny Machado and Brian Dozier, which made L.A. even deeper all over the field, the production at second base has ticked up into the top half of the majors. Situational hitting -- a problem all season for L.A. -- isn't a position, but with some highlight-reel late comebacks over Arizona this weekend, maybe that aspect of the Dodgers' season is shoring up. If so, that leaves one Achilles heel -- the bullpen. The human heel isn't that big, but it was enough to take down Achilles. And L.A.'s heel stands in the way of the 2018 Dodgers becoming a truly great team. Can that group come together during some high-stakes games this month?

---

## **Washington Nationals**

**Current win forecast:** 83.2 (change from spring: -7.7)

**Current playoff probability:** 9.5 percent (down 56.5 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.4 percent

For one thing, the Nationals aren't completely out of it. They are almost completely out of it, but the math doesn't close the door completely. And even though the Nats have been in a mild tear-down mode for the past month or so, this is still a roster that has Cy Young candidate Max Scherzer, Bryce Harper -- possibly in his final days playing for Washington -- Trea Turner, Stephen Strasburg, Anthony Rendon and super-duper teenager Juan Soto. Washington also just called up outfielder Victor Robles, who entered the season ranked higher on the prospect lists than Soto. Washington may not be a real contender, but they have lots of games left against teams that are in the thick of the race -- the Cardinals, Cubs, Phillies, Braves and Rockies. The Nationals may not get into the playoffs, but they'll still have plenty of say in who will.

## **Pittsburgh Pirates**

**Current win forecast:** 78.1 (change from spring: +1.8)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 17 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Pirates fans aren't going to want to hear this, but Pittsburgh's pursuit of a winning record is something to root for. I know it doesn't do a thing to assuage the club's failure to get over the top during the wild-card years. Still, the Pirates were under .500 every season from 1993 to 2012. Again, winning is better than losing. Besides, this team could easily bounce back toward contention next season, so why not enter the winter with the good vibes of a winning season? Beyond that, how could you not be amped that, with the recall of Kevin Kramer on Tuesday, the Pirates can now field that double-play combo of Kramer and Newman that they had in the minors?

---

## Miami Marlins

**Current win forecast:** 63.6 (change from spring: -0.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 2 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Players aren't interested in pursuing high draft picks for the teams that pay them. They like to win, even for one day, because as Nuke LaLoosh said, "It's, like, better than losing." And for the fans, the pursuit of No. 1 is not really a great reason to watch a team, even though you know it's better to pick at the top of the draft than even a few spots down. This year, Baltimore and Kansas City have thoroughly embedded themselves at the bottom of the MLB standings. They'll pick first and second, with the Orioles likely in the top spot. But then you have six teams that currently have between 78 and 85 losses -- the Marlins are one of them, which is why I bring all this up here, along with the White Sox, Tigers, Rangers, Reds and Padres. One of those teams will pick third next June. But one of them will pick eighth. According to baseball-reference.com, No. 3 picks have earned a combined 578 WAR during the history of the draft. No. 8 picks have earned 280. Just sayin'.

---

## San Francisco Giants

**Current win forecast:** 78.3 (change from spring: -1.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.1 percent (down 23.9 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

I can't do this one. I'm not sure why you would want to watch the Giants. There are no real prospects on the roster now that Stephen Duggar is out. There are no individual quests of note. You'd like to see Joe Panik enter the winter with some confidence, or at least get back above replacement level. You'd like to see Evan Longoria get comfortable hitting at AT&T Park. Madison Bumgarner is always worth tuning in for. Still, the 2018 Giants are about as humdrum as it gets. Great city, beautiful ballpark, and there might be playoff games nearby in Oakland a month from now.

---

## Chicago White Sox

**Current win forecast:** 66.5 (change from spring: -2.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 5 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

I'm going to deploy some arbitrary end points and tell you that of their 31 games, the White Sox have won 19. Over a longer stretch, they've won 26 of 50. They've improved on both sides of the ball, and with a big September, Chicago's batsmen have a shot at actually reaching league average. This is the trajectory you want to see out of a building team. The upsurge of offense has been driven by a lot of guys who might not be regulars on the next White Sox-contending club. But the pitching improvement is exciting -- young starters Lucas Giolito, Carlos Rodon, Reynaldo Lopez and Michael Kopech have driven the success and should be mainstays for years to come.

---

## Detroit Tigers

**Current win forecast:** 63.1 (change from spring: -2.6)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 3 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Remember the middle of June, when the Tigers had won five straight to close within a game of .500 and within a few games of Cleveland? No one really treated Detroit as if it were a surprise contender, and it turns out that was the prudent position to take. Since then, the Tigers have gone 19-46 and have been outscored by 103 runs. Their loss to Chicago on Monday dropped them behind the White Sox and into fourth place in the AL Central. While the White Sox's season trajectory is a good one for a rebuild, the shape of the Tigers' season is not what you want to see. I'm not sure that the perception of forward momentum would do as much for the Tigers as it does for the White Sox anyway. Detroit's timeline seems longer. In the meantime, I guess you watch the kids -- defensive dynamo JaCoby Jones, recently recalled Dawel Lugo, Rule 5 pick Victor Reyes, underrated Nick Castellanos. Better than nothing, I guess.

---

## Los Angeles Angels

**Current win forecast:** 79.9 (change from spring: -4.8)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 39 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Mike Trout is back in the lineup, and even though the Angels aren't in the chase, he's still very much in the MVP picture. That's something to watch. Also, and you may not have heard about this, but the Angels have a rookie pitcher who is the first player since Babe Ruth to start 10 games and hit at least 10 home runs in a season. Assuming his elbow is sound, watching Shohei Ohtani is a solid way to wind down the season. Meanwhile, Albert Pujols is out for the season, which is sad, but that commercial he's in where he plays a clerk at a hardware store is pretty entertaining. And kind of touching.

---

## San Diego Padres

**Current win forecast:** 65.2 (change from spring: -5.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 9 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

I'm telling you right now that the Padres are one of my picks as a sleeper/breakout team for next season -- maybe next year's version of this year's A's or Braves -- so why not get a sneak preview by watching their last month? Franmil Reyes is a powerhouse and has 15 homers and a .283 isolated power rate despite playing his home games at Petco Park. He also has just 23 RBIs. If those homer & ribbie numbers were to stay the same, that would be eight fewer RBIs than a player has ever had in a season with 15 or more dingers. Even if he hits, say, six more homers with eight more RBIs, that would be 10 fewer RBIs than anyone has had in a season with 21 or more long balls. If that's not worth watching, I don't know what is. Other than that, Luis Urias just came up, and he's a long-term solution at second base, possibly soon partnering with prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. He's a good-looking player.

---

## Texas Rangers

**Current win forecast:** 69.6 (change from spring: -5.1)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 12 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

Rangers pitching continues to be ghastly, but the offense has gotten a little closer to being the force we thought it might be, given the talent of Texas' young position players. Texas was scoring at a below-average rate as late as the All-Star break despite the hitter-friendly conditions of Globe Life Park. Now the Rangers are on pace to finish 60 runs better than average. There have been some real success stories. The biggest has been the improvement of Rougned Odor, who has discovered the wonders of having a plan at the plate. He's on pace to put up a 3.8 WAR season, more than twice his preseason forecast, with both his offense and defense rating well above average. Jurickson Profar is on pace for 3.6 WAR in his first full shot at a near-everyday role. Given the stadium, the Rangers' offense and the Rangers' pitching staff, if you like runs, tune in to Texas.

---

## Cincinnati Reds

**Current win forecast:** 69.9 (change from spring: -5.7)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 15 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

I track nightly pitcher game scores through the prism of matchups between starting pitchers, awarding wins to the pitchers who outperform their counterparts. Homer Bailey this season is now 0-18-1 in that system. He's not much better under the traditional system of handing out wins, going 1-13 over his first 14 decisions. Bailey signed a six-year contract extension with the Reds back in February 2014. It runs through next season, then there is a mutual option for 2020. Bailey hurt his elbow six months after signing that deal and eventually underwent Tommy John surgery. Since the injury, Bailey has gone 9-26 with a 6.27 ERA over 45 starts with a 67 ERA+. The Reds don't have much going on for the stretch run, so how about creating a little upward momentum for Bailey heading into the winter? He's earned it.

---

## Toronto Blue Jays

**Current win forecast:** 72.3 (change from spring: -6.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 21 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

It's tempting to recommend that you forgo watching the Jays and instead just watch YouTube videos of Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hitting bombs in the minors. Goodness knows you can't see the real thing in Toronto. This is a transitional big league roster right now. The Jays straddled the fence between tearing down completely and hoping they could sneak in a wild-card run. It wasn't a bad decision, but it's the kind of thing that gets ugly when it doesn't work out. You don't have the kids who are part of your future on display just yet, and there are a lot of players on the roster who aren't going to be around a year or two from now. Toronto has Kevin Pillar patrolling center field, and they have Aaron Sanchez, who only last year was looked at as one of the most promising young starters in baseball. Helping Sanchez find himself is a worthy task for this September for the Jays.

---

## Minnesota Twins

**Current win forecast:** 75.2 (change from spring: -7.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 38 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

The Twins became the latest team to try the opener strategy this weekend, and the results weren't promising. They lost to Texas 18-4 and closed out the loss by giving catcher Chris Gimenez his 12th career appearance as a mop-up pitcher. But they'll keep trying it because that's what this month is for. Beyond that, this could be (but probably isn't) the final month in a Twins uniform for local hero Joe Mauer. Those things are worth watching. So too would be watching Byron Buxton play center field but ... service time. I don't blame the execs playing this game, but something has got to change on the policy front in this area.

---



## **New York Mets**

**Current win forecast:** 74.0 (change from spring: -8.4)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 35 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

This latest lost season for the Mets has become entirely about Jake deGrom, who continues on his historic roll. The numbers are becoming dizzying. He has allowed just 35 earned runs in 28 starts this season, and seven of those came in a two-game span in April. He has a string of 20 straight quality starts. I don't care what you think about that stat, I've always liked it as an indicator of consistency, and that is freaking amazing. With the Nationals out of the race and the Phillies' season teetering, arguments favoring Max Scherzer or Aaron Nola because of their higher-stakes games are weakening. If deGrom keeps this up through the end of the season, his numbers will be too overwhelming to deny -- even if he finishes with eight wins. By the way, his game score won-lost record is up to 20-8. Scherzer is at 23-6, and Nola is at 19-8-1.

---

## **Kansas City Royals**

**Current win forecast:** 56.1 (change from spring: -13.3)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 7 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

With a weekend sweep of Baltimore, the Royals likely won themselves out of a shot at the first overall pick in the draft. It's not so much a goal that the players would strive for as it is a sadistic wish of a true blue Royals fan. Take solace in this, Royals fans: K.C. has picked first one time in franchise history and drafted righty Luke Hochevar, who had his moments as a reliever but still retired with 3.6 career bWAR. The Royals have picked second twice: In 2005, they took Alex Gordon (34.4 bWAR), and in 2007, it was Mike Moustakas (14.1 WAR). Maybe No. 2 is their wheelhouse. With time to kill between now and next June, why not turn your laser focus onto second baseman Whit Merrifield, who is on pace to be a 5 WAR player this season.

---

## **Baltimore Orioles**

**Current win forecast:** 48.3 (change from spring: -21.9)

**Current playoff probability:** 0.0 percent (down 7 percent from spring)

**Current championship probability:** 0.0 percent

The Orioles' average loss total in my current simulations is 114 games. The most games the Orioles have lost since they moved from St. Louis in 1954 is 107. That happened in 1988, the season Baltimore started by losing its first 21 games. It seems like a virtual certainty that this year's Birds will fly by that club -- in the wrong direction, of course. The Orioles have never really embraced their St. Louis Browns heritage, but this year, they may have to. The most games the Browns lost was 111, in 1939. Those Browns may soon have company.