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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Pablo Sandoval triples but strains hamstring sliding into home

John Shea

Pablo Sandoval epitomized the ups and downs of the Giants' season on a single fifth-inning sequence.

Sandoval legged out a two-run, stand-up triple (his first since 2015) and scored on a medium-deep flyball. But he strained his right hamstring on his slide, held his leg walking back to the dugout and will have an MRI exam Monday.

Sandoval wasn't limping in the clubhouse after the game. Asked whether he expects to miss time, he said, "I hope not. I'll be missing time when (Brandon) Belt comes back."

The Giants already were thin at first base with Belt on the disabled list with a hyperextended right knee. Austin Slater replaced Sandoval and moved to left field when Chase d'Arnaud played first.

Sandoval said he had a similar feeling to 2012 when straining his hamstring doing the splits at first base. He missed three weeks.

Rare double play: The Giants pulled off a rare double play when Slater caught a foul popup while reaching into the stands, then threw to pitcher Sam Dyson covering first base, where Milwaukee's Christian Yelich was off the bag.

"I thought it was going in the seats," Dyson said. "I saw Slater going over there, and I figured if he was putting in the effort, I better put in the effort. He made an awesome play."

Slater gave credit to Dyson, saying, "Sammy was standing right there, so I tried to throw a little dart to him. He did a little toe drag, a little fancy footwork."

Initially Yelich was ruled safe, but the call was reviewed and overturned. Dyson said he knew he got the out because Yelich stepped on his foot.

Briefly: Giants right fielder Andrew McCutchen exited in the eighth with a foot contusion after getting hit by multiple foul tips. ... There was no update on right-hander Johnny Cueto, who visited doctors a day after admitting he has been pitching with a sore right elbow, igniting fears of possible Tommy John surgery. ... Giants left-hander Andrew Suarez gave up two homers for the first time since May 11 (a span of 13 starts). Ryan Braun hit a two-run homer and Hernan Perez hit a solo shot.

San Francisco Chronicle

Buster Posey collects 4 hits in Giants' skid-busting win

John Shea

A simple and sweet swing might help end a losing streak, but not a team's woes. Whatever the effect in the long run, it sure felt good Sunday for Buster Posey to barrel up on an inside fastball and smack it to the left-field gap.

This has been a trying stretch for the Giants' catcher, a hip ailment zapping his power, but his three-run double was reminiscent of the old Buster and ignited the struggling Giants to an 8-5 victory over the Brewers at AT&T Park.

Posey followed with three singles for his first four-hit game since 2016 — his only out came in his first at-bat, a sizzling liner to first base — and the Giants were thrilled to engage in postgame high-fiving after losing four in a row and six of seven.

"All year, we've been streaky," Posey said. "We'll go on a stretch where we'll win eight of 10, then lose seven of nine. It seems it's been that up-and-down type of year. Hopefully, we can get on a hot streak and minimize some of these lulls we've had."

With the recent tailspin and Tuesday's trade deadline looming, these are uncertain times for the Giants, who had two players leave Sunday's game, Pablo Sandoval with a strained right hamstring (MRI exam Monday) and Andrew McCutchen with a foot contusion after a foul tip.

Yet, as players packed for their trip to San Diego, they made sure to embrace the win in a bubbly clubhouse filled with loud music and optimism.

Posey even did an impersonation of manager Bruce Bochy.

Bochy missed the game to be at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, where his closer from his Padres days, Trevor Hoffman, was inducted, along with one of his former coaches, Alan Trammell.

Hensley Meulens managed for the day and apparently made all the right moves.

“He did great,” Posey said. “We’re going to see if we can keep Bochy away for a couple of more days.

“I can hear him,” added Posey, dropping his voice an octave or two: ““Oh, if you guys score eight runs, I’ll stay away.””

Bochy still got credit for his 1,906th win, moving past Hall of Famer Casey Stengel for possession of 11th place. Even though Meulens ran the show, it counted on Bochy’s record.

“And he wasn’t even here for it,” quipped Posey.

Posey missed the All-Star Game to stay in the Bay Area, have a cortisone shot and receive treatment for his hip. He went 3-for-20 in the first two series after the break but hit better in the Milwaukee series, going 7-for-12.

Aside from Posey’s third-inning double, he singled three times, twice by punching grounders through the right side as the Brewers shifted left.

“It’s not like I was trying to hit the hole there,” Posey said. “It just happened from the swing. I’ve talked to some of the guys about shifts. I think if you look (at the shifted alignment), sometimes you can deviate from your approach.

“I do also think it’s good for your mind’s eye to look around and see where people are. Like everything else in baseball, there’s that fine line. I don’t think you try to manipulate the ball unless there’s a drastic hole for you.”

It’s one day, one series. But it’s refreshing for someone who had just one extra-base hit in 17 games leading into the series.

“He had a big game for us. Hopefully, he can continue any way he can even though he’s not 100 percent,” Meulens said. “We’ve seen him do that before. The hip (issue) is not going to go away overnight. Hopefully, it will hold up through the season so he can continue to produce.”

After his double, Posey scored on Evan Longoria’s sacrifice fly. Gorkys Hernandez homered in the fourth, and Sandoval broke the game open with a two-run triple in the fifth but pulled the hamstring sliding at the plate on a sacrifice fly.

MLB.com

Cueto likely headed to DL for elbow issues

Anne Rogers

After throwing just 61 pitches in a season-low four innings on Saturday, Giants starter Johnny Cueto appears to be headed back to the disabled list.

Alex Pavlovic of NBC Sports tweeted Monday, "[Giants general manager] Bobby Evans said Cueto likely will be placed back on the DL today. No word on future steps yet, he saw doctors yesterday and will be re-evaluated early this week."

Cueto exited Saturday's 7-1 loss to the Brewers after allowing eight hits and struggling with velocity. His fastball, which usually averages 90.1 mph, dropped to 88.5 mph during his outing.

Cueto previously went on the disabled list on May 2 with elbow inflammation. He opened the season with a 0.84 ERA in five consecutive quality starts, but he has yet to record a quality start in four outings since returning to the team on July 5.

After Saturday's loss, Cueto said the elbow pain he has felt with every pitch feels the same as what he experienced earlier in the season.

MLB.com

Bats come to life as Giants take series finale

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Giants conducted a successful search for their missing offense Sunday. And the longer they looked, the more they found.

They rediscovered the notion that they could score in different ways, bunching their runs between the third and fifth innings in an 8-5 triumph at AT&T Park. The outcome prevented Milwaukee from sweeping the four-game series.

After batting .213 (20-for-94) in the series' first three games and scoring one run in each of the previous two contests, the Giants finally displayed offensive diversity. They totaled 13 hits and recorded the cycle as a team for the first time since June 8 at Washington.

This performance enabled the Giants to feel good about themselves and believe that Tuesday's looming non-waiver Trade Deadline will prompt the organization to strengthen the roster for the stretch drive, despite deficits of six games in the Wild Card spot and 6 1/2 games in the National League West.

"All year we've been streaky," said catcher Buster Posey, who led the Giants with his first four-hit game since Sept. 15, 2016, against St. Louis. "We'll go out and win eight of 10 and then lose seven of nine. Hopefully, we can get on a hot streak and minimize some of the lulls that we've had."

They capitalized on some untimely Brewers walks, loading the bases on free passes from Junior Guerra in the third inning before Posey clobbered a three-run double that erased Milwaukee's 2-0 lead. It was only the third extra-base hit in 19 games for Posey.

The Giants welcomed such an essential contribution from their renowned six-time All-Star.

"I think you could see the joy in everybody's faces in the dugout that we finally broke through and got a big hit," said bench coach Hensley Meulens, who served as acting manager while Bruce Bochy attended the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in Cooperstown.

San Francisco turned to power one inning later when Gorkys Hernandez homered to straightaway center field in the fourth. It was Hernandez's 12th homer of the season, which ranks second on the club.

The Giants were at their most entertaining in the fifth, when Pablo Sandoval drove in two runs with his first triple -- a standup triple, no less -- since June 14, 2015. One batter later, Sandoval scored on a sacrifice fly but grabbed the back of his leg as he walked to the Giants' dugout. He left in the sixth inning with a right hamstring strain.

The prime beneficiary of this offensive outburst was Giants starter Andrew Suarez (4-6), who yielded four runs and eight hits in six innings. The rookie left-hander had to adjust his approach after yielding Ryan Braun's two-run, first inning homer.

"I know there's still a lot of baseball left after that," Suarez said. "I got to make sure to settle down and keep doing my job."

SOUND SMART

Though Meulens ran the show Sunday, the statistical credit for the Giants' victory went to Bochy, who was in Cooperstown to witness the Hall of Fame inductions of reliever Trevor Hoffman and infielder Alan Trammell. It was Bochy's 1,906th career managerial win, nudging him past Casey Stengel for sole possession of 11th place on the all-time list.

"Really special," Meulens said. "Any time you win a game to pass somebody along the line, you know how great he's been for us. I'd like to personally congratulate him. Too bad he wasn't here to see it himself, but being at the Hall of Fame wasn't a bad place to be today either."

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Giants recorded an inning-ending double play in the seventh when Austin Slater, who was inserted at first base an inning earlier, reached over the railing of the first-base photographers' well to snare Jesus Aguilar's foul popup. Avoiding entanglement in the protective netting, Slater wheeled and flipped the ball to reliever Sam Dyson, who covered first base, to double off Christian Yelich. The initial "safe" ruling was overturned following a replay review.

UP NEXT

The Giants open a two-game set in San Diego with left-hander Derek Holland (5-8, 3.92 ERA) on the mound. Holland, who was added back into the rotation on July 25, threw six innings of two-run ball (one earned) in his last outing. The left-hander has posted a 2.70 ERA across five starts in June and a 2.74 ERA in 23 innings in July. The Padres will counter with fellow southpaw Eric

Lauer (5-7, 5.29). First pitch at Petco Park is scheduled for 7:10 p.m. PT.

MLB.com

Sandoval leaves in 6th with hamstring strain

Martin Oppegaard

SAN FRANCISCO -- Pablo Sandoval exited Sunday's 8-5 win over the Brewers at AT&T Park with a right hamstring strain, according to Giants bench coach Hensley Meulens.

Sandoval, starting at first base for the injured Brandon Belt, hit a two-run triple in the fifth. One batter later, Steven Duggar lofted a flyball to right-center field. Sandoval tagged on the play and slid into home before Manny Pina's tag, but walked back to the Giants' dugout holding his right leg. The injury, he said, happened on the slide.

"When I slid into home plate, I felt something," Sandoval said. "Not in the running. When I tried sliding I felt something."

Sandoval was replaced at first base by rookie Austin Slater and will receive an MRI on Monday morning. The veteran said his hamstring feels the same as it did when he strained it stretching at first base to help turn a double play in 2012.

Additionally, right fielder Andrew McCutchen was replaced in the eighth inning Sunday with a left foot contusion after fouling multiple pitches off his foot.

The Giants did not provide any updates on right-hander Johnny Cueto, who left Saturday's outing after 61 pitches due to right elbow discomfort.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Johnny Cueto likely headed back to DL with elbow issues

Alex Pavlovic

SAN DIEGO -- As they left San Francisco on Sunday night, the Giants weren't quite sure of the severity of Pablo Sandoval's hamstring strain, or whether Andrew McCutchen's foot bruise would heal enough in time for the right fielder to start Monday night at Petco Park. But they had a pretty good idea of where they stand with right-hander Johnny Cueto.

General manager Bobby Evans said it's likely that Cueto will end up back on the DL. Cueto was pulled after just four innings Saturday night and later admitted his elbow still flares up every time he throws a pitch. Cueto met with team doctors on Sunday morning at AT&T Park and Evans said he will be evaluated again early this week. It's unclear if Cueto will see an outside specialist, although he saw several when his elbow first started hurting in April, including Dr. James Andrews, who told him he did not need Tommy John surgery.

This time around, Cueto seems less optimistic about the next step. He missed two months

already with the elbow sprain, which never healed, and allowed 16 runs in his four starts back.

“I keep telling you guys and keep telling myself I’m fine, but in reality, I’m not,” he said after Saturday’s start.

The Giants already have their best alternative in the rotation. Derek Holland took Jeff Samardzija’s spot and will start Monday night. Ty Blach and Chris Stratton are on the roster as long relievers, and one would be next up if a Cueto replacement is needed Friday night in Phoenix.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Shift-busting Buster Posey leads Giants to offensive outburst

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO — After joking that Bruce Bochy should stay away for a few more days, Buster Posey lowered his voice and dropped into his Bochy impression.

“If you guys score eight runs every game I’ll stay away,” Posey said, mimicking his longtime manager.

That’s a deal Bochy might actually make given the way his team has hit in recent weeks. With their manager at Cooperstown for Trevor Hoffman’s Hall of Fame ceremony, the Giants picked up 13 hits and beat the Brewers 8-5, salvaging a game in this four-game series.

When Bochy was hospitalized for a night two seasons ago, Brandon Crawford picked up seven hits in a win. This time, Posey was the one to have the huge day. His three-run double in the third ignited the dugout and provided much of the offense.

The double, which followed three walks, was Posey’s first hit to produce three runs since a homer last August 8. This was his first four-hit game since Sept. 15, 2016. Posey followed the double with three singles, repeatedly beating Milwaukee’s shift of three infielders on the left side.

“It’s not like I’m trying to hit the hole there,” he said. “I’ve talked to some guys about it before with shifts. If you look (at the shift), sometimes you can deviate from your approach. I do think it’s good for your mind’s eye to look around (though).”

Whatever he was doing, it was working. Posey was in the middle of much of what went right, scoring twice in addition to his three RBI. The Giants spent most of July getting no-hit through three or four innings and facing opponents’ best relievers. On Sunday, they jumped on Junior Gerra and made sure they wouldn’t have to see Josh Hader, Jeremy Jeffress, Joakim Soria and Corey Knebel.

The outburst snapped a four-game losing streak and potentially gave management a little more

to think about before Tuesday's trade deadline. A sweep would have sent quite a loud signal that there's some selling to do. This was just one win, but the Giants got a game back on the first-place Dodgers, and Posey was hopeful that the eight runs could jumpstart the offense in time for a six-game trip to San Diego and Phoenix.

"All year we've been streaky," he said. "We win eight of 10 and then lose seven of nine or something. Hopefully we can get on a hot streak and minimize the lulls."

NBC Sports Bay Area

Giants notes: Pablo Sandoval will undergo MRI on hamstring on Monday

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO — Brandon Belt will travel with the Giants to San Diego and hopes to be back when his 10 days on the disabled list are up. Belt said if it's not 10 days exactly, it shouldn't be more than two weeks total dealing with a bone bruise.

The Giants thought they could get through 10-14 days without their first baseman. Now they might have to replace Belt's replacement. Pablo Sandoval was removed during Sunday's 8-5 win over the Brewers because of a right hamstring strain. Sandoval will have an MRI on Monday. He said he wasn't sure if he will go on the DL.

"We'll do the MRI tomorrow and see what's going on," he said.

Sandoval said he felt a similar sensation in 2012 when he got hurt doing the splits at first base. That hamstring injury cost him nearly three weeks. This time around, it was a slide that knocked him out. Sandoval hit a two-run triple and then tagged and scored on a fly ball to right. He grabbed his leg as soon as he got up.

Sandoval wasn't the only one to be removed. Andrew McCutchen was pulled late because of a foot contusion. He fouled a couple of balls off his foot and felt pain as he tried to stand up from the bench. There was no timetable for McCutchen, although contusions are generally minor.

--- Joe Panik got the day off after playing nine innings for the River Cats on Saturday night. He'll resume his rehab assignment on Monday, and should be back with the big league club in a few days.

--- Hunter Strickland threw off a bullpen mound for the first time since injuring his hand when he punched a door at AT&T Park. Strickland appeared to be letting it rip, but he won't be back until August 18. The Giants put him on the 60-day DL so he needs to wait this one out no matter how good he feels.

--- There was no update on Johnny Cueto, although he saw team doctors in the morning. It appears Cueto will go on the DL, but the Giants did not call up an extra player on Sunday. With the other injuries, that led to a shortage, and acting manager Hensley Meulens had to use Ty

Blach as a pinch-hitter and Chase d'Arnaud as a first baseman.

--- The Giants sold out two of the four games against the Brewers and drew 40,000 for all four of them. Ownership may eventually sign off on a rebuild for baseball reasons, but the business is doing just fine.

The Athletic

Down on the farm: Chris Shaw making his case for a shot with the Giants

Melissa Lockard

After a rough June, Triple-A Sacramento River Cats outfielder Chris Shaw is heating up at a good time. Shaw is putting the finishing touches on a strong July in which he has hit .264/.337/.505 with six home runs and 17 RBIs. Shaw now has 21 home runs in 81 games for the River Cats this season.

Unless the Giants acquire an established big league corner outfielder and get into the thick of the playoff race, September should be a month for the Giants to see what they have in Shaw going into next season.

With 657 career at-bats at the Triple-A level under his belt, Shaw has shown both his strengths and weaknesses. He's shown big league power with a .525 SLG and 39 home runs in 169 games. He's also shown a free-swinging approach that has resulted in a 228:37 K:BB. Ideally, Shaw would improve his K:BB before he reaches the big leagues, but given the Giants' struggle to find power at the big league level, they may look past that weakness to see how his power plays in the big leagues this September.

Shaw has particularly struggled against left-handed pitchers this season. A left-handed hitter, Shaw is batting just .169 in 71 at-bats versus southpaws. He hit well against lefties last season (.284) in Triple-A, but historically he has hit better versus right-handed pitchers. One possibility is that the Giants try a Shaw-Austin Slater or Shaw-Mac Williamson platoon in left field this September. If the Giants can find a cheap alternative for a run-producing position like left field for next year, it will free them up to add in other areas they don't have cheap solutions for, like the starting rotation.

Giants part ways with two veterans on minor league deals

The Giants released veteran catcher Ryan Hanigan and veteran right-hander Chris Heston from their minor league contracts this week. Hanigan had been on the Triple-A Sacramento roster, while Heston was pitching for Double-A Richmond at the time of his release.

Hanigan, 37, joined the Giants on a minor league deal in late May as catching depth behind Buster Posey and Nick Hundley. Hanigan struggled during his time with the River Cats. He appeared in only 18 games and spent a week in June on the disabled list. In 57 at-bats, Hanigan hit only .175/.254/.193. Trevor Brown and Aramis Garcia are the leading candidates to join the

Giants as a third catcher when rosters expand in September.

Heston, 30, spent 2009-2016 in the Giants' organization before he was traded to the Mariners in December 2016. Heston spent 2017 with the Mariners, Dodgers and Twins before electing free agency in the offseason. He returned to the Giants on a minor league deal and he was expected to spend the season in the River Cats' rotation, serving as depth for the Giants' rotation. Instead, he landed on the disabled list on April 13 after only one start for the River Cats. After a long rehab that included five appearances in the Arizona Rookie League, Heston joined the Richmond roster on July 15. He was released after allowing five runs in nine innings over three appearances for the Flying Squirrels.

Bart continues to roll

Joey Bart is wearing out Northwest League pitching. The Giants' 2018 top pick had a two-homer game on Friday and went 8 for 18 with four doubles and three walks this week.

Bart is making a strong case for a promotion to full-season ball before the end of the season. In 20 games with short-season Salem-Keizer, Bart has nine home runs and a .341/.389/.780 line. He's driven in 24. He's been effective against both righties (.357 BA) and lefties (.308 BA). Bart has also flashed a strong arm behind the plate, catching six of 18 attempted base-stealers.

Extra Innings

— River Cats' outfielder Mac Williamson is batting .270 with three home runs over his last 10 games, as he tries to push himself back into the Giants' outfield plans. He's walked six times and has driven 11 over that stretch.

— Pleasant Hill native and Diablo Valley College alum Myles Schroder homered twice on Sunday for the River Cats. He has four homers over his last five games and eight in 63 games this season. The 30-year-old has played every position except center field for the River Cats this season. He also pitched 1 1/3 innings in a spot relief appearance.

— Since being sent back to Triple-A on Friday, infielder Kelby Tomlinson is 5 for 12 with a walk and a stolen base.

— Left-hander Conner Menez had another outstanding start for Richmond this week. On Friday, he worked 5 2/3 scoreless innings, striking out 10 and walking one. Over his last four starts, Menez has allowed five runs on 16 hits and five walks in 26 innings. He's struck out 31 over that span.

— Chase Johnson returned from the Richmond disabled list on Sunday and threw three scoreless innings in a loss to Reading. Johnson walked two but didn't allow a hit in his three frames.

— Right-hander Dusten Knight completed a rehab assignment in Arizona and joined the Richmond bullpen this week. Knight was in Triple-A when he landed on the disabled list on May

14 after feeling soreness while warming up to start game two of a doubleheader. He's made two appearances since his return to Richmond, allowing just a walk in three scoreless innings. He's struck out two.

— Right-hander Logan Webb made two starts this week for High-A San Jose, and he allowed just two unearned runs in 9 1/3 innings over those two outings. He struck out 12 and walked five. Webb has lowered his ERA to 1.82 for the season. He has 80 strikeouts and 39 walks in 78 1/3 innings for the Giants. After Sunday's start, Webb was promoted to Richmond, according to Giants broadcaster Joe Ritzo.

— For the first time this season, outfielder Heath Quinn hit in the leadoff spot for San Jose on Sunday. Quinn reached base four times, collecting two hits and two walks. He has 30 walks and an .875 OPS in 67 games this season.

— After missing nearly three months, outfielder Malique Ziegler returned to the Low-A Augusta GreenJackets' roster this week. Ziegler picked up right where he left off with Augusta, going 6 for 16 with a walk in four games (Sunday's game was suspended due to rain). Ziegler, 21, has a .918 OPS in 25 games for Augusta this season.

— Augusta right-hander Aaron Phillips finished off a strong month of July with a six-inning outing on Thursday in which he allowed three runs and struck out nine. In five July starts, Phillips posted a 3.00 ERA with a 39:3 K:BB and a .223 BAA. Phillips was the Giants' ninth-round pick last season.

— David Villar, the Giants' 11th-round pick this season, is off to a strong start to his professional career. The South Florida alum hit .316 with a .440 OBP in six games with the AZL Giants Black before moving up to Salem-Keizer. In 28 games with the Volcanoes, the third baseman has six home runs and a .275/.325/.523 line.

— Right-hander Solomon Bates, the Giants' 2018 eighth-round pick, struck out eight in three scoreless innings for Salem-Keizer on Friday. It was Bates' second straight scoreless appearance and it lowered his ERA to 5.27. He has 22 strikeouts but 10 walks in 13 2/3 innings.

— Talented outfielder Alexander Canario had a two-homer game for the AZL Giants Black on Wednesday. It was part of a three-hit night during which he also stole a base. The 18-year-old got off to a bit of a slow start, but he's been rolling of late, hitting .359 with three home runs and eight walks over his last 10 games. Canario has shown power and speed, but perhaps the most impressive aspect of his game is his approach. He walked 33 times in 66 games last year as a 17-year-old in the Dominican Summer League. This year, he has 19 walks and a .403 OBP in 24 games in the Arizona Rookie League.

— AZL Giants Orange first baseman Beicker Mendoza continues to be one of the top hitters in the Arizona Rookie League this season. The 20-year-old homered on Thursday and he has five multi-hit games over his last 10. He's batting .353/.381/.578 in his third season in the AZL.

— Mendoza's teammate — Yorlís Rodríguez — is putting together an impressive debut season after signing with the Giants last July out of Cuba. The 19-year-old is batting .344/.423/.458. He has walked 12 times in 25 games.

The Athletic

Giants Analytics: Trade deadline, July power outage, Cueto, and the young outfielders Owen Poindexter

At the start of July, the Giants had reason to be hopeful. The pitching staff was coming together, and the veteran lineup was getting healthy. Now, with the month coming to a close, the team has stumbled badly, winning only one series out of seven. Their playoff odds, via Fangraphs, are below 5 percent. To salvage this season, they'll need to have an August as good as this July was bad.

Could that happen? The offense is almost certain to be better, if only because it's unlikely that a previously middle-of-the-pack lineup will continue to be 23 percent worse than league average, as they have been this month. Despite the heroic efforts of Hunter Pence, who has used an exit velocity increase of nearly 5 mph this month to vault himself to a .500 slugging percentage in the month of July, the veterans in the lineup are failing to produce, and the saviors from earlier in the year, like Alen Hanson and Gorkys Hernández, are out of magic. Let's look at what's gone wrong, the looming trade deadline, and some hope in the form of two young outfielders.

Decision time

The Giants are a veteran team, built to contend. As we come up against the trade deadline, they are a game under .500 with three teams between them and the division lead and five separating them from a wild-card spot. What should they do? They might take some inspiration from the last team to employ Mark Melancon, Tony Watson and Andrew McCutchen.

Two years ago, the Pirates were lingering around the edges of the playoff race, but also had an expiring asset in Melancon, who would go on to become a free agent and sign with the Giants. The Pirates sent their closer to the Nationals in exchange for Felipe Vázquez, who would become one of baseball's best closers the next season. The deal made the Pirates a little bit worse in the short term, but they had other strong relievers in the fold, namely Watson, and it ensured that they got something for their best trade chip.

While it's unlikely any team will come knocking for Melancon and the obligation to pay him roughly \$36 million through the 2020 season, the Giants could hedge their bets this season by dealing from their excellent bullpen. Will Smith has been dynamite since returning from Tommy John surgery this year and is controlled for one more year at a very affordable price. His 42.9 percent K-BB rate against lefties is otherworldly. He would be a huge trade chip, if made available.

The bullpen obviously weakens without him, but Watson, Reyes Moronta, Melancon and

eventually Hunter Strickland form a very capable group.

To my knowledge, Smith isn't available, and the Giants are looking for modest adds, not subtractions. Keeping him is what any team built to win now would do, but he'll never be more valuable, and if the Giants can't right the ship, they'll wish they had flipped one of their best assets at the peak of his value.

Power outage

Due to the shot in the arm from Steven Duggar, Austin Slater and Chase d'Arnaud, as well as Buster Posey and McCutchen continuing to find their way to first, getting on base has not been the Giants biggest problem. Once aboard, however, scoring hasn't been easy because the team's power output has been close to non-existent.

For the chart below, EV refers to exit velocity (in mph) and ISO is a stat that measures power by subtracting batting average from slugging percentage. League average ISO is .161 this year.

Contributions from Hanson and Hernández should probably be thought of as bonus anyway, as they weren't expected to contribute much this year, but the middle four are the core of the Giants' lineup, and it's hard for this team to have a productive offense when all four are posting anemic power numbers.

Hanson, McCutchen and Crawford simply aren't hitting the ball as hard. Posey may just be experiencing a small sample size blip, but he also hasn't been a big power source to begin with. It's hard to know whose timing is a little off and who (other than Belt and Posey) is nursing an injury, but it's likely that we will see some positive regression here. The question is if it comes soon enough.

What's wrong with Cueto?

Johnny Cueto is not himself. He said as much after another rough start on Saturday. After giving up only one home run over his first seven starts, he gave up seven in his first three after coming back from injury. He didn't allow any long balls in his most recent start on Saturday, nor did he walk anyone, but he also didn't strike anyone out, and the Brewers dinged him up for four runs and eight hits over four innings.

Cueto's biggest problem is that his fastball, a key part of his arsenal, is not currently an effective pitch. Prior to the injury, his four-seamer gave up three singles on 31 batted balls, for a batting average and slugging percentage of .097. Since returning from the injury, that pitch has lost a little velocity and is now turning opposing hitters into Mike Trout with an average of .350, slugging of .850. Scratch that, Trout isn't that good.

Cueto has also gone from tempting hitters with the high fastball pre-injury (left image) to trying to hit the outside corner against righties, inside against lefties.

He isn't healthy, and it's likely Cueto will end up with at least some time on the disabled list to try to get right, if not undergo Tommy John surgery. While an offensive upgrade is likely the priority at the moment, the Giants could seek to add some depth in the rotation at the deadline. It's between that and rolling the dice with Derek Holland or Ty Blach.

Youth infusion

There have been a few bright spots for the Giants lately, namely their hitters making the most of their first semi-regular at-bats in the major leagues. Slater (.302/.415/.358) and Duggar (.276/.317/.379 with good defensive marks) are making the case they belong. Duggar will need to find a way to reduce his 33 percent strikeout rate, especially when his .421 BABIP settles down to something more sustainable, but Slater will likely be a regular in the AT&T Park outfield, whether or not he bounces between the majors and Triple-A this year. While he hasn't hit for any power so far, that shouldn't be an issue going forward, as he showed decent power in the minor leagues. His groundball rate as a major leaguer has been a huge 72.2 percent in a short sample. That will come down, likely taking his .444 BABIP with it, but as he hits more balls in the air, his 90 mph exit velocity will be good for some big hits. Slater probably won't be a star, but he can be a piece of the ongoing puzzle that is the Giants.

The Athletic

With Bruce Bochy in Cooperstown, Giants bats break out and add to his Hall of Fame résumé Andrew Baggarly

Bruce Bochy's travel odyssey began Saturday night with a red-eye flight to ORD and no shot at REM.

Even if you find it easy to drift off on a commercial airliner (and if you do, please offer your tips in the comments section), a four-hour flight that lands at 6 a.m. is an invitation to bleary eyes and bobbing heads.

Then came the 90-minute layover, a narrow seat on a connecting regional jet from Chicago to Albany, followed by a two-hour drive through the bucolic dells of upstate New York, and then maybe enough time to grab a sandwich before the Hall of Fame induction ceremony began under the Cooperstown sunshine.

Bochy hesitated to ask for permission, but ultimately he sought and received the Giants' blessing to take leave from their dugout Sunday. It meant too much to be able to witness the career apex for two of his favorite people from his decade managing in San Diego: Trevor Hoffman, his longtime relief ace, and Alan Trammell, who served as one of his base coaches.

If Bochy had stayed back to manage a regular-season game for the 3,815th time in his life, instead of bearing witness to a lifetime celebration of two dear friends, he knew he would forever feel the pangs of regret. Perhaps losing two other dear friends earlier this year — his joined-at-the-hip GM with the Padres, Kevin Towers, and his longtime bench coach in San

Diego, Rob Picciolo — made enough of an impact on the son of an army sergeant to where duty took on a different definition.

And, as Bochy told USA Today's Bob Nightengale after arriving at the ceremony, "Hey, we lost (four) in a row. We've got to change our luck. I'm in hallowed grounds now. Maybe this will help."

Maybe it did.

After two weeks of looking to dry skies, the offensive downpour that Bochy had longed to see finally arrived Sunday in an 8-5 victory over the Milwaukee Brewers. Buster Posey had his first four-hit game in two seasons, and his bases-clearing double in the third inning was his first three-run hit since August of last year. Pablo Sandoval drove in two with his first triple since 2015 with the Red Sox. Even pitcher Andrew Suárez, who barely picked up a bat through high school and college, found a way to a big league hit. Gorkys Hernández hit his 12th home run, which is 12 more than he hit last season. The Giants avoided getting swept in this four-game series, which served as a setback to their fringe hopes of contending. But Bochy keeps saying that the bats are due to get on a roll. It had to start somewhere, even if the manager wasn't there to witness it.

One more detail: even though bench coach Hensley "Bam Bam" Meulens was giving the signs, the victory officially goes on Bochy's career record, which stands at 1,906-1,909. And Sunday's win moved him past Casey Stengel and into sole possession of 11th place on the all-time managerial victories list.

Each of the 10 men ahead of him is enshrined in ... well, you know.

The list: Connie Mack, John McGraw, Tony La Russa, Bobby Cox, Joe Torre, Sparky Anderson, Bucky Harris, Joe McCarthy, Walter Alton and Leo Durocher. With any luck, Bochy will pass Leo the Lip (2,008 wins) next season, which is also the final year of his current contract.

"I'd like to personally congratulate him," Meulens said. "Too bad he wasn't here to see it himself. But Hall of Fame isn't a bad place to be, either."

Bochy hadn't been to Cooperstown since he managed the Padres in the Hall of Fame exhibition game in 1997. He and Twins skipper Paul Molitor, who was there to see Jack Morris go in, became the first current managers to attend the induction ceremony.

It might be a matter of time before Bochy has his own plaque. In his more immediate future was another cross-country travel gauntlet to San Diego for Monday's series opener against the Padres, when he will be confronted with more injuries to triage.

Sandoval is likely headed to the disabled list. He grabbed his right hamstring after sliding home on a sacrifice fly Sunday and will have an MRI exam. Sandoval said the discomfort was similar to

the hamstring pull he sustained in 2012, when he did the splits at first base and ended up missing three weeks.

Andrew McCutchen might be less of a concern, but he had to exit on a double-switch in the eighth when he felt pain after fouling several balls off his foot.

And there was a potentially devastating decision looming regarding Johnny Cueto, which will impact the rotation order in the short run and could cause much more chaos in the longer term.

The injuries forced Meulens into some creative maneuvers. Austin Slater replaced Sandoval at first base and stayed with a foul pop that would've been in the 15th row if the breeze hadn't blown it back within reach. After reaching into the photographers' well to make the catch, Slater turned around and was surprised to see pitcher Sam Dyson covering first base, where a napping Christian Yelich was doubled off.

What the heck was Dyson doing there?

"Why? Because nobody else was there," Dyson said. "That's where a pitcher is supposed to go."

Those are the kinds of heads-up plays that warm a manager's heart. But Bochy probably would've appreciated Posey's three-run double most of all — especially since no Giant had a multiple-RBI game over the previous week.

Posey batted with one out and a two-strike count, and given how the Brewers outfielders were shading him, they did not expect him to pull a 94 mph fastball on the inner half.

Posey pulled a 94 mph fastball on the inner half. His double found the huge expanse in left-center.

"With two strikes you can't really ... I don't think you can sell out (on an inside pitch)," Posey said. "You just open yourself up to too many other pitches."

"I've talked to some of the guys before about shifts. I think if you look sometimes, you can deviate from your approach. But I think it's good for your mind's eye to kind of look around and see where people are. Like everything else with baseball, there's a fine line there. I don't think you want to try to manipulate the ball, unless it's just such a drastic hole for you."

Will the offense find more of those holes? Or at least enough to give their pitchers a chance to get them on the kind of roll that they are out of time to start?

Maybe. Maybe not. In the meantime, Posey grumbled and did his best Bochy impression, which tells you it was a productive day at AT&T Park.

"We're gonna see if we can keep Bochy away for a couple more days," Posey said, smiling.

“What do you think? You think he’ll stay? I could hear him, like, ‘Awww, if you guys score eight runs, I’ll stay away.’”

Stengel said it best: “Managing is getting paid for home runs someone else hits.”

Three-run doubles, too.