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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants set dubious strikeout mark in Phillies' 4-game sweep

Henry Schulman

PHILADELPHIA — A Giants team that lost 98 games last season had a nice three-week run, and after three fun-filled days in Atlanta, they were reminded what being a winning team feels like.

Then Philadelphia happened, a four-game black hole filled with enough hitters striking out to set a franchise record, most of the starters getting shelled and endless renditions of that sugary Phillies victory song, "High Hopes."

The Giants got swept in a four-game series against the Phillies for the first time since 1982, dropping their record to 19-19, although they looked nothing like a .500 team at Citizens Bank Park.

In Thursday's 6-3 loss the Giants struck out 15 times, 12 at the hands of starter Vince Velasquez, giving them 55 for the series. That obliterated the franchise record for a four-gamer, at least since 1913, when baseball started to keep accurate records.

Their previous high was 44 at Arizona in 2003.

"I think you look at all the big arms they have, all hitting 95 (mph), and having good secondary pitches," manager Bruce Bochy said.

When the Giants slumped early this season they were chasing a lot of offspeed pitchers. In this series, the Phils fired fastballs at them that screamed, "Here you go. Hit it."

Velocity is the name of the game now, and a Giants lineup full of older hitters who might not have the bat speed of the young studs in the game must find a way to adjust.

Evan Longoria, who struck out six times in 15 at-bats (to go with three doubles), blamed approach as well.

"We probably could have done a better job grinding through at-bats," he said. "We got into some pretty quick holes and weren't able to find our way out. It's the opposite of what you saw in Atlanta. We jumped to early leads, added on and made it easier on our pitchers."

The Giants did jump ahead Thursday, 3-0, on Gregor Blanco's game-opening home run and Alen Hanson's two-run homer in the second inning.

Ty Blach, returning to the scene of his lone big-league shutout, was rolling for three innings. Then he issued the dreaded leadoff walk to Aaron Altherr in the fourth. Before Blach could exhale, he had given up four runs, the last three on a homer by Carlos Santana.

"A leadoff walk is unacceptable with a three-run lead," Blach said. "You can't do it."

The Giants got a total of 18 innings from their starters in the four games. That cannot continue in Pittsburgh, where the Giants need to take two of three to go home 5-5 on a trip that began with three uplifting triumphs.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' roster move means no Johnny Cueto until June 28 at earliest Henry Schulman

PHILADELPHIA — Days after the Giants said **Johnny Cueto** would miss six to eight weeks with a sprained right elbow, they conceded the “six” part was not going to happen. They needed a 40-man spot to promote reliever **Jose Valdez** from Triple-A on Thursday and placed Cueto on the 60-day disabled list.

Cueto will not be eligible to return until June 28, two months after his last start. Manager **Bruce Bochy** said the Giants are “being on the safe side of when we think he’ll be ready and finish his rehab.”

Meanwhile, **Madison Bumgarner** is expected to throw off a mound for the first time as early as Monday and could start what should be a four- or five-game rehab assignment in the minors within two weeks.

The absences of Bumgarner and Cueto have led to a lot of short outings by starters, necessitating gobs of bullpen innings. That, in turn, has created a nearly constant shuttle of relievers between the big club and Sacramento.

D.J. Snelten threw 54 pitches of mop-up Monday night so he went down and **Derek Law** was recalled. Law threw 39 pitches Wednesday, so down he went (without a chance to pitch in his hometown of Pittsburgh this weekend) and up comes Valdez, a 28-year-old right-hander who has thrown in 46 big-league games since 2015.

This is hardly the ideal way to run a roster, but this is the Giants’ lot with their top two starters gone unless those who are here improve and provide more quality innings, as **Chris Stratton**, **Ty Blach** and **Andrew Suarez** did in Atlanta.

The Giants considered options besides Valdez, including Triple-A starters **Tyler Beede** and **Dereck Rodriguez**, who are accustomed to long outings, but Bochy said the organization wants them to continue starting in case they are needed in the big-league rotation.

As long as the rotation struggles to provide innings, the Giants will have to stick with 13 pitchers. So the question of when **Mac Williamson** or **Hunter Pence** might return is moot for now. The Giants do not have a spot for a fifth outfielder.

The Giants made one more roster move, activating left-hander **Josh Osich** from the disabled list

and optioning him to Sacramento.

Briefly: Carlos Santana, the Phillies' big winter acquisition, hit three homers and had 13 RBIs in the series to double his totals for the season. ... The last Phillies' four-game sweep against the Giants occurred May 13-16, 1982, at Veterans Stadium.

San Francisco Chronicle

For Giants' McCutchen, a hero's welcome awaits in Pittsburgh

Henry Schulman

PHILADELPHIA — During Andrew McCutchen's painfully slow start with the Giants, Pirates fans flooded social media begging San Franciscans to be patient because "Cutch" usually has bad Apriils.

Pittsburghers love McCutchen the way a parent loves a child. Their heartache upon his trade to San Francisco was matched by the angst they felt for him having to leave his beloved home and move across the country.

No one need wonder how Pittsburgh fans will react Friday night when McCutchen returns to PNC Park. It will be a lovefest with tears on all sides.

Before the Giants concluded their four-game series against the Phillies on Thursday, McCutchen said he knows he will get a great reception, but has no idea how he will feel when it happens.

"I didn't know how I was going to feel before I got married as my wife's walking down the aisle," he said. "I didn't know how I was going to feel when my wife was having that child and I saw him for the first time. You can ask how you think you're going to feel. I don't know. I never experienced it before.

"I'll be there, be in the moment and let the emotions be what they are. I try to live in the moment of everything. It's newfound to me."

To understand the significance of this homecoming, Giants fans would have to imagine Buster Posey being traded to the Pirates, then returning to AT&T Park for the first time.

Reliever Tony Watson, a longtime McCutchen teammate in Pittsburgh, said the comparison is not quite apt because of the three championships Posey helped bring.

“For Pittsburgh, more than anything, it will be about the man he is,” Watson said. “It says a lot, what he did, what he still does. He’d go to the children’s hospital. Every kid’s favorite player was Cutch. The parents love Cutch.

“He’s a great human being. That more than anything is what you’ll see when they come out and show their respect. I think that first (at-bat) will be pretty cool. I don’t know how he’ll do with the emotions. Hopefully, he can keep them in check and get us a big knock.”

Pittsburgh fans can breathe easier knowing the San Francisco faithful have begun to see *their* McCutchen. He has hit .394 over the past 11 games since batting .198 over his first 25. Even as he slumped, he gave Giants fans a glimpse of his 2013 MVP self with two walk-off hits. McCutchen said it “definitely” would have been worse to return to Pittsburgh in a slump.

The 31-year-old right fielder opened a window into his emotions during his 10-minute interview with Giants beat reporters, which is good, because he has been hard to read.

McCutchen has had his share of laughs on the field and in the clubhouse, but also seems reserved much of the time. He acknowledged how hard the transition has been, not so much on the field, but off of it.

He and his wife, Maria, had to uproot themselves and their newborn son, Steel, to a different spring training in Arizona and new home in San Francisco.

“It’s hard for me. It’s even harder for my wife,” McCutchen said. “She was in Arizona by herself. She’s in San Francisco by herself trying to raise a little baby, and most times, she’s doing it on her own. That’s a toll.

“She’s been adjusting well. I commend her for that because it’s not easy.”

The Giants acquired McCutchen for one guaranteed season hoping he would fall in love with

the team and city and consider re-signing as a free agent. That will not happen if he does not have a fun year.

Is he having one so far?

“Fun is fun, man. I always have fun,” he said. “That never changes. The cameras catching me smiling, laughing, whatever, that’s what I do. You might change where you are, something that you’re used to, and go somewhere where you’re not quite used to it. I treat the game the same way. I go out there, play it, play it hard and have fun doing it. That never changes.”

What changes Friday is McCutchen happily sleeping in his own bed and awaiting an ovation from fans who will stand and cheer unabashedly.

“I’ll do my best to be in the moment and cherish it,” he said, “because it’s not going to last very long.”

The Mercury News

Giants swept by Phillies, set franchise record for strikeouts in four-game series

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—Thursday was a day of firsts for the San Francisco Giants.

Their contest against the Phillies featured the team’s first-ever game broadcast exclusively on Facebook.

Their 6-3 loss marked their fourth straight defeat in Philadelphia, and the first time they’ve been swept in 2018.

And with 15 strikeouts, including 12 against Phillies starter Vince Velasquez, the Giants for the first time in the franchise history — 135 years! — have struck out 11 times or more in four consecutive games.

“It was the opposite of what we saw in Atlanta,” third baseman Evan Longoria said. “We were able to jump out to an early lead and add on and it makes it a lot easier for the pitchers. We didn’t give them any help in this series.”

The Giants' visit to Philadelphia was disastrous at the plate, in the field, on the base paths and unsurprisingly, on the mound.

After the past three Giants' starters failed to pitch beyond the fifth inning in the any of their previous three games, left-hander Ty Blach returned to the site of his first and only career shutout. The Giants' offense spotted Blach three early runs to work with, but he surrendered four in the fourth and was yanked by manager Bruce Bochy after recording just one out in the bottom of the fifth.

Starters Jeff Samardzija, Derek Holland, Chris Stratton and Blach combined to throw just 18 innings over four days as the Giants lost their four matchups with the Phillies by a total score of 30-8.

Giants hitters did little to aid the pitching staff's cause, as San Francisco established a new franchise record for strikeouts in a four-game series with 55. The club's previous high was 44, which were accumulated from August 29-September of 2003 against the Diamondbacks.

"We ran into a hot team and we didn't do a lot offensively," Bochy said. "A lot of strikeouts. I don't know what we had today, 14 or 15, but they threw some good arms at us. Their pen has been doing a good job. They put it to us."

Three different Giants hitters –Longoria, Gorkys Hernandez and Brandon Belt–struck out at least six times over four games while Brandon Crawford and Gregor Blanco each struck out five times.

Entering the game riding their third different three game losing streak of the year, the Giants surged to an early lead thanks to a pair of home runs.

Blanco crushed his fifth career leadoff home run on the second pitch of the game to push the Giants ahead 1-0 before second baseman Alen Hanson turned on an 0-1 fastball and pulled it into the right field bleachers to give the team a 3-0 lead in the second.

"It was sending a message to the other team that we were ready to play the game today," Blanco said. "It was a really tough series and I needed to do something to change the momentum. The first couple innings it worked out and then after that, we just never caught up."

After Hanson's blast, nine of the next 11 Giants struck out. Eight of those players went down

swinging, as Blach was the only player during Velasquez's most impressive run to take a called third strike.

"It just seemed like it was an uphill battle the whole way," Longoria said.

The 17 swing-throughs Velasquez induced paled in comparison to the 26 Tuesday's starter Aaron Nola racked up, but he pitched well enough to exit with a 5-3 lead after six innings.

For the fourth straight day, Phillies first baseman Carlos Santana delivered a devastating blow to the Giants pitchers as the hottest stretch of his season continued in the bottom of the fourth.

"We were trying to pitch him tough the whole series," Blach said. "You could see from the first day he was seeing the ball pretty well. We were just trying to be aggressive in the strike zone with him and he was taking some good swings."

Santana entered the week hitting .169 with three home runs and 13 RBIs, but he raised his average 22 points and finished the four-game set with six home runs and 26 RBIs. Santana's three-run home run off Blach in the fourth gave the Phillies a one-run edge that grew when Odubel Herrera greeted left-hander Will Smith with an RBI single after he entered in the fifth.

Though two of the four games the Giants lost against the Phillies were blowouts, the bullpen offered the club's hitters a chance to engineer a comeback win. After Hanson's home run with no outs in the top of the second, the Giants failed to score again.

The Giants haven't had a starting pitcher record more than 16 outs since Saturday, so rookie Andrew Suárez will be counted on to right the ship in the series-opener in Pittsburgh after picking up his first career win against the Braves on Sunday.

The stress the Giants starters created for their bullpen during the series forced the club to make a transaction Thursday, as reliever Jose Valdez was added to the roster while right-hander Derek Law was optioned to Triple-A. The Giants transferred starter Johnny Cueto to the 60-day disabled list to clear a 40-man roster spot for Valdez, which means the earliest Cueto can return from his sprained elbow is June 29.

The Mercury News

Should the Giants be concerned about their increase in strikeouts?

Kerry Crowley

PHILADELPHIA—Phillies starter Aaron Nola should be an All-Star this year, but on Tuesday night, the Giants helped the right-hander look like a Cy Young contender.

Nola induced 26 swings and misses on 109 pitches, the second-most whiffs generated by any pitcher in a single game this season. His curveball darted out of the zone and his changeup complemented a pair of fastballs he commanded on either side of the plate, so it wasn't a surprise that Nola established a new career-high with 12 strikeouts.

One element of Nola's performance that might raise concerns for the Giants is that he picked up his final strikeout in the sixth inning, meaning San Francisco did little to test the Phillies' defense early in a game decided by two runs.

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It's not the first time an opposing starter has carved up Giants hitters and cruised to a win this year, a trend that may prove troublesome if it continues throughout the season.

Through 37 games, the Giants have already struck out at least 10 times in 18 contests and posted a 6-12 record in those games.

After Nola exited Tuesday's game, three Phillies relievers combined for five more strikeouts as the Giants ended a nine-inning game with 17 punchouts for the second time this season. Prior to 2018, the Giants had only struck out 17 times once in a nine-inning game and that was an 18-strikeout day against Dodgers left-hander Sandy Koufax on August 31, 1959.

Between 1960 and 2017, the Giants had never struck out more than 16 times in a nine-inning game. In the past three weeks, they've done so twice.

Contact is down around baseball as the so-called "launch angle revolution" has inspired players to swing for the fences, but teams that strike out more than others aren't necessarily doing themselves any favors.

The club with the lowest strikeout rate in the Major Leagues last season was the Houston Astros, and they won the World Series. But was their ability to put the ball in play a predictive measurement for their overall success?

The 2016 champions, the Chicago Cubs, ended the regular season with the eighth-worst strikeout rate of any team, so striking out at a high clip isn't guaranteed to prevent success.

On the opposite side of the equation, the 2018 Kansas City Royals currently lead the league with the fewest strikeouts per nine innings this season, but they're already 12 games under .500.

Over the course of a season, a team is bound to face pitchers who earn their paychecks because they miss bats with such regularity, but the Giants have already matched up against several of the league's strikeout leaders.

Nationals starter Max Scherzer leads all of baseball with 13.94 strikeouts per nine innings and he racked up 17 swings and misses and 10 strikeouts in a 15-2 win over the Giants. D'Backs left-hander Patrick Corbin, who ranks second in the National League in strikeouts per nine innings, has faced the Giants twice and picked up 17 strikeouts over 14 and 1/3 innings.

Angels left-hander Garrett Richards hasn't thrown enough innings to qualify for the leaderboard, but his 11.8 strikeouts per nine innings would rank fourth among all Major League pitchers. His outing against the Giants padded his total, as he punched out 11 San Francisco hitters in the club's first 17-strikeout game of the year.

Is a high strikeout rate destined to doom the Giants over the course of a 162-game season? The data available suggests it's difficult to draw any significant conclusions, but whiffing so frequently probably won't crush the Giants' bid to contend.

The New York Yankees have won 17 of their last 18 games and strike out at a nearly equivalent rate to the Giants. Of course, the Yankees have hit a Major League-best 51 home runs, but they're not the only team that's succeeding despite their swings and misses.

The Phillies are on the brink of surpassing the Braves for the National League East lead and their 9.83 strikeouts per nine innings is the third-worst rate in baseball. The first-place team in the National League West, the Arizona Diamondbacks, are also striking out more often than the Giants, and they don't rank among the top half of baseball in total homers.

With six weeks of the regular season in the books, it's too soon to say if a Giants team that posted the sixth-best strikeout rate in baseball in a 98-loss season will be held back by having the league's eighth-worst strikeout rate to date.

Instead, it might be better to hold off from big-picture conclusions and evaluate strikeout rates on a micro level.

Center fielder Austin Jackson's strikeout rate is up 13 percentage points this season compared to his career rate of 23 percent. Jackson has struck out in 17 of his 29 at-bats against right-handed pitchers, and the Giants know Jackson is best served by playing in favorable matchups against lefties.

If left fielder Mac Williamson returns from the disabled list and picks up where he left off, the Giants won't need to use Jackson against right-handed pitchers. But with just four healthy outfielders on the roster and a limited amount of options for manager Bruce Bochy to turn to, Jackson has had to take more at-bats against righties.

"Right-handers, he's had his struggles," Bochy said. "He'll try to get a little more contact here and put the ball in play, but in the early go he just hasn't gotten on track."

Shortstop Brandon Crawford and third baseman Evan Longoria are the two regular starters whose strikeout rates have spiked at least five percentage points above their career averages this season, but both players struggled through tough stretches at the beginning of the year.

"We said the same thing about Crawford a week ago and you see how he's picked it up," Bochy said. "It's going to take a good game or two and (Jackson) will get rolling."

Thanks to a late April surge, Longoria cut down his strikeout totals and raised his batting average. During the first week of May, Crawford did the same. Though a higher strikeout rate for either player shouldn't dramatically alter the Giants' ability to drive in runs, the club might actually benefit if both players attempt to lift the ball in the air more often.

Longoria leads the Giants in extra base hits and big swings from Crawford have the potential to extend big innings because he usually hits in the sixth slot or lower in the Giants order.

Ultimately, the Giants have posted a better record when they don't strike out so frequently, but on some days, they're bound to run into All-Star candidates like Scherzer, Corbin and Nola. Those are games they're more likely to lose anyway, so perhaps it's too soon to evaluate how an increased strikeout rate may be hurting the Giants' chances.

And perhaps Nola will contend for that Cy Young Award after all.

MLB.com

Times change, but Bucs. Love for Cutch remains

Adam Berry

PITTSBURGH -- **Andrew McCutchen** needs no introduction in this city. He was the face of the Pirates' franchise for nine seasons, its best player since Barry Bonds and perhaps its most beloved star since Willie Stargell. He was productive and popular. He helped end the franchise's 20-year losing streak and brought postseason baseball back to Pittsburgh.

On Friday, he'll be reintroduced as a San Francisco Giant.

The Pirates are set to open a three-game series against McCutchen and the Giants at PNC Park on Friday night. It will be McCutchen's first game in Pittsburgh as anything other than a Pirate. There will be a video tribute and standing ovations in the first inning. There will be talk of his legacy and the January trade that sent him to San Francisco. And there will be many memories shared.

Everyone has a McCutchen story. Before the Pirates' first official meeting against McCutchen, here are a few of theirs about their introduction to -- or first impression of -- their former teammate.

Neal Huntington wasn't the Pirates' general manager when they drafted McCutchen 11th overall in 2005. His first impression of McCutchen came when he was assigned to evaluate the Pirates' organization in Spring Training of 2007, when he was scouting for the Indians.

"Andrew's bat speed and explosive athleticism capture your attention immediately," Huntington said. "Watching him compete that spring was like watching a seasoned veteran, as he never seemed anxious or rattled in the box, on the bases or in the field."

When Huntington became Pittsburgh's GM in September 2007, he said he knew that, "Andrew was the key to the future." They met for the first time in the spring of 2008 during the players' entrance interviews.

"Andrew's intelligence, poise and presence were obvious," Huntington said. "The meeting with Andrew exceeded all of the expectations resulting from those that had worked with him and all the positive things they had to say about Andrew. Andrew was genuinely self-confident yet genuinely humble, which is a rare combination for elite athletes at a young age.

"His bat speed, athleticism, poise and presence are what stood out to me as a competitor and evaluator. Once I became a Pirate, his humility and character were added to the mix."

Jordy Mercer was in the Florida Instructional League in Bradenton, Fla., after his first professional season. McCutchen didn't have to be there, Mercer said, as he was nearing the Majors and the shortstop was just starting his climb to Pittsburgh after being drafted in 2008.

Even then, before his 2009 debut, McCutchen stood out.

"I don't know what he was doing there, but he came over and practiced with us. That was the first time I met him," Mercer said. "I was just like, 'It's Andrew McCutchen!' We were all like, 'What the hell's he doing here?' I remember being kind of star-struck that he was there and practicing with us, and he was there in general."

The Pirates played the Rangers in Arlington in 2010, when Clint Hurdle was Texas' hitting coach. He took notes on the entire Pittsburgh roster, including McCutchen, throughout the series and reviewed them before interviewing for the Bucs' managerial job later that year. The first two Pirates players he met were Joel Hanrahan and **Neil Walker**, but he met with McCutchen before his first Spring Training.

"I remember walking away feeling like there was a lot of thought involved. He's a smart guy. He articulated his thoughts clearly, communicated very well," Hurdle said. "Had a passion for the game of baseball, which you could feel. Also morphed into talking about his family. He talked about respect for the game and the desire to play the game hard."

Jameson Taillon will be the first Pirates pitcher to face McCutchen on Friday. He's joked around the clubhouse that he might quick-pitch to pre-empt the inevitable ovation, but in reality, he'll let McCutchen have his moment.

"He deserves it," Taillon said. "I hope it's packed for him."

When Taillon was a prospect, he used to sit in the stands to watch big league Spring Training games. Even now, he remembers the generosity that **Pedro Alvarez**, Walker and McCutchen -- all former first-round Draft picks like Taillon -- extended to Minor Leaguers.

"I remember when we did the player panels at Pirate City. Big leaguers come over and offer any sort of insight they have," Taillon said. "I remember people just lining up for pictures with Cutch after. He had professional baseball players wanting to get pictures with him. That's the ultimate honor, and that tells you how big of a star he was and how highly regarded he was.

"Man, he had that superstar status. Then I got to become teammates with him, and that was cool."

Chad Kuhl, who will face McCutchen on Saturday, was drafted in 2013, McCutchen's National League MVP Award campaign. Kuhl showed up early for Minor League Spring Training in '14, and the big leaguers were already populating the Pirate City clubhouse. While passing through the big league side of the room to get to his locker, Kuhl brushed shoulders with McCutchen, still sporting his signature dreadlocks at that point.

"He might have said, 'Hey,' and I was just kind of star-struck," Kuhl said. "I walked right by him and almost froze. I was just star-struck. I was like, 'Holy crap, that was Andrew McCutchen.' I had that star-struck moment first time seeing him."

Trevor Williams, acquired in October 2015, used the same term, "star-struck," to describe his first interaction with McCutchen. Their conversation in the spring of 2016 wasn't all that memorable -- "It wasn't anything profound," Williams said -- but the moment was.

"I was especially star-struck by him because he encapsulated the Pirates. Like, he was the Pirates," Williams said. "Once I came over, once I got to meet him, it was like I'm officially a Pirate now, I guess you could say."

Sean Rodriguez quickly developed a relationship with McCutchen in 2015, Rodriguez's first season with the Pirates, and they remain close friends. It all began with a song by the Christian rapper Lecrae.

"When I first came into the clubhouse, my first Spring Training, I was always big on having a little speaker and putting music on," Rodriguez said. "I put some music on and he was sitting not too far away and he started singing to the song that came on. I was like, 'Man, I didn't think there were too many people out there who knew this.' Just got to talking then. We had a lot of similarities. Similar taste in music. Similar faith. We just hit it off."

The Pirates played a pair of exhibition games in Philadelphia before Opening Day in 2015, and then-prospect **Josh Bell** got to make the trip. After one of the games, Bell said, he went out to

dinner with McCutchen, Rodriguez and **Josh Harrison**. McCutchen's star power was on display, as fans followed their group from the hotel to the restaurant and back in pursuit of an autograph.

"That's unlike anything I've seen to this day, that celebrity status away from the field," Bell said. "Just seeing that, people almost begging and pleading for an autograph, kind of opened my eyes to who he was and what he did on the field and what he meant to the game. That was my first real impression where I was like, 'Oh my God, I get it, but jeez!'"

When Pittsburgh traded McCutchen, Harrison became the Pirates' longest-tenured player. He made his MLB debut on May 31, 2011, a little more than two years after McCutchen's first big league game. They became fast friends, probably as close as any two people in the Pirates' clubhouse. Harrison and McCutchen still talk on the phone and via text message, and their wives also keep in touch.

The former teammates' conversations are different now than they were back in 2011, when Harrison was 23 and McCutchen was 24. Now, they might be exchanging parenting advice or asking about Harrison's daughters, Mia Jade and Kinsli Rose, or the McCutchens' 5-month-old son, Steel.

"Times are changing," Harrison said. "We're not babies anymore. We've got babies."

MLB.com

Early homers not enough as giants fall in Philly

Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- The breeze from the Giants' bats blew away layers of dust on pre-PDF record books as their hitters established a franchise record for strikeouts in Thursday's 6-3 loss to the Philadelphia Phillies, who completed a four-game series sweep at Citizens Bank Park.

The Giants struck out 55 times against Philadelphia, their most for a four-game series since 1913. Sandy Koufax never led this kind of effort. Nor did Bob Gibson, Tom Seaver, Fernando Valenzuela or any of the storied aces the Giants once confronted regularly.

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These Giants ran afoul of a group of starters -- **Zach Eflin, Aaron Nola, Nick Pivetta** and **Vince**

Velasquez, backed by stout relievers -- who appeared to be on the cusp of harnessing their rich talents.

"They're all big arms," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "They're all at 95-plus [mph] and have good secondary pitches."

What was more aggravating than the 15 strikeouts Giants hitters accumulated Thursday against Velasquez and three relievers was the feeling of, "What happened?" Just last weekend, the Giants looked resurgent while sweeping a three-game sweep at Atlanta.

"We followed our best series with one of our worst," third baseman **Evan Longoria** said. "Credit to them. They threw the ball really well. We probably could have done a better job of grinding through some at-bats. We didn't swing the bat really well with runners in scoring position in the limited opportunities that we had. We were in some pretty quick holes."

One exception was the outset of Thursday's finale, when San Francisco jumped ahead, 3-0, through two innings on homers by **Gregor Blanco** and **Alen Hanson**, but couldn't sustain that momentum. San Francisco mustered just two hits following Hanson's long ball. Giants starter **Ty Blach**, who pitched a shutout here last June 2, cruised until the fourth inning, when he yielded four runs, including three on **Carlos Santana**'s homer.

By delivering his fifth career leadoff homer, Blanco tried to fulfill his role as a leader.

"I was looking to pump the guys up and send a message to the other team that we were ready to play the game today," he said.

Overall, however, the Phillies denied the Giants all access toward opportunism.

"In the whole series, I had maybe only two good pitches to hit," Blanco said. "One I hit for a home run and the other I fouled off."

Despite the outcome, Bochy sounded anything but defeated.

"We're not going to dwell on this," Bochy said. "That's the last thing I want these guys to do. We have to bounce back. It's going to happen during the season -- you get in a little funk, the pitch speed may not quite be there or the offense gets shut down. You've got to be resilient in this game. That's what it's about."

SOUND SMART

The Phillies recorded their first four-game sweep of the Giants since May 13-16, 1982. Steve

Carlton won the second game of that series for Philadelphia, which finished off the sweep behind a complete-game three-hitter from Mike Krukow in a 6-1 win.

HE SAID IT

"Sweeping that team, that's a huge accomplishment. That's a good group over there. That team is going to win a lot of baseball games. I'm proud of the last four games for us." -- *Phillies manager Gabe Kapler, on the Giants*

UP NEXT

In what promises to be an extremely emotional evening on Friday, Giants right fielder **Andrew McCutchen** will return to Pittsburgh's PNC Park for his first appearance with the Giants since they acquired him during the offseason from the Pirates. Expect long ovations from the home crowd when McCutchen comes to bat. The pitching matchup features Giants left-hander **Andrew Suarez** against Pirates right-hander **Jameson Taillon**, with first pitch set for 4:05 p.m. PT.

MLB.com

Giants add Valdez, move Cueto to 60-day DL
Chris Haft

PHILADELPHIA -- The Giants' nonstop tinkering with their pitching staff continued Thursday as they transferred right-hander **Johnny Cueto** to the 60-day disabled list to facilitate right-hander **Jose Valdez**'s arrival from Triple-A Sacramento.

Cueto likely will need most of June to recover from his sore right elbow.

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Re-classifying Cueto enabled the Giants to create 40-man roster room for Valdez, who was 1-2 with a 3.71 ERA in 12 appearances at Sacramento. To vacate a spot on the 25-man active roster for Valdez, who has pitched for the Tigers, Angels and Padres, the Giants optioned right-hander **Derek Law** to Sacramento.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy indicated that similar moves to keep the pitching staff fresh will be forthcoming. He mentioned Sacramento right-handers **Tyler Beede** and Dereck Rodriguez as others who the Giants have considered summoning.

San Francisco also reinstated left-hander **Josh Osich** (hip) from the disabled list and optioned him to Sacramento.

The Athletic

Outpitched, out-positioned, outplayed: Why the whiffing Giants didn't measure up in Philly **Andrew Baggarly**

PHILADELPHIA – The Phillies hosted 10,000 elementary school kids at Citizens Bank Park Thursday afternoon as part of a science and weather program. Three innings into the game, enough pre-pubescent voices chirped in unison to make “Giants suck” audible from pole to pole.

There really is no place quite like Philadelphia.

Hopefully, debating 9-year-olds isn't your thing, because you won't find much in the way of contradictory evidence. The Giants lost 6-3. They were swept by the Phillies in a four-game series for the first time since 1982. They trailed at the conclusion of 31 innings out of 36, and held a lead after just three.

Most glaring: in a series that could've been sponsored by Bausch & Lomb, the Giants struck out 15 more times Thursday to finish with 55 strikeouts here — not only setting a franchise record for a four-game series but obliterating the previous one.

The Giants had struck out 44 times over four games in a 2003 series against the Arizona Diamondbacks, and at least that was an understandable result. Randy Johnson and Curt Schilling pitched two of those four games.

The Phillies started Zach Eflin, Aaron Nola, Nick Pivetta and Vince Velasquez. There isn't an All-Star in the bunch. But their velocity was real. So is their upside. Given the talent that is coalescing in Philadelphia and the loaded farm system that is beginning to reach harvest in Atlanta, the long-term outlook for a team like the Washington Nationals doesn't appear too bright in the NL East.

The Giants, of course, already experienced their dying of the light following three World Series titles in five seasons. They lost 98 games last year, and responded by doubling down on their 30-something core. Watch them get outslugged, outpitched, out-positioned and outplayed in four games here, and it's tempting to wonder if they're capable of falling into the same abyss — or at least reach the conclusion that this spackle-with-stars plan is doomed to fail.

Then again, this is the same Giants team that arrived in Philadelphia fresh off a rousing, three-game sweep in Atlanta. Sure, they had trouble catching up to the Phillies' assortment of hard throwers. But they also barreled up the Braves Mike Foltyniewicz's 97 mph heaters just a few days earlier.

So what to make of winning three against one upstart team and then losing four to another?

“You just have to wear it, I guess, and go on to Pittsburgh and hope we play well there,” shortstop Brandon Crawford said.

Hitters never like to tip their hats. But any other way to explain this series would be too emotionally loaded, too fraught with self-doubt. So tip their hats they shall.

“It seemed like their entire team was throwing 95 but they were hitting their spots,” Crawford said. “It’s some of the best pitching we’ve seen all year where guys were not making mistakes. It was impressive.

“And it’s partially us. We need to focus a little more on at least trying to make more contact with two strikes. But you’ve got to give credit to them, too. They pitched their butts off.”

Added Nick Hundley: “They have really good arms up and down. We saw four really good starters and (Jake) Arrieta, we missed, and he’s done a lot of good things in this game. Yeah, their stuff lines up with anybody in the league. They flat-out beat us.”

It must be maddening to be a 30-year-old major league hitter in 2018. You grew up your whole life hearing about the importance of an up-the-middle approach, using all fields, making hard contact, having a two-strike strategy that allows you to punch back or at least make a productive out.

But even on a few occasions when Giants hitters did everything right Thursday, they had no rally-igniting result to show for it. Crawford blistered a ball up the middle in the eighth inning that probably results in a hit 99 times out of 100 in his rookie season.

“I’d go with 100 out of 100, actually,” he said in a flat voice.

It was an out. The Phillies had Crawford shifted perfectly, with the shortstop stationed over second base. They did the same to take away a similarly barreled ball up the middle from Nick Hundley in the ninth.

“That’s the game now, with all the analytics and all the shifts,” Hundley said. “That’s why you’re seeing averages decline. You can’t aim. You’ve just got to take your swing and hit the ball as hard as you can.”

That works if you’re Giancarlo Stanton or Joey Gallo or Rhys Hoskins. The Giants don’t have those kinds of players. They have talented hitters who have made their careers finding gold in the crevices between those Three True Outcomes.

You can’t strike out 55 times in four games. You can’t start a rally with a hard shot up the middle. What, then?

“I don’t know,” said Crawford, who has been showing bunt often on early-count pitches in an attempt to pull the third baseman closer. “Personally, I don’t think about it. I’m obviously trying to put the ball in play hard. If you hit the ball hard, you have a better chance of getting the hit. Obviously there (in the eighth inning), it didn’t work out. But in the first game of the series, I chopped one to where the shortstop would normally be and it was a base hit. Not saying they even out by any means, but if you’re putting it in play, you’re giving yourself a chance to get a hit.”

Clearly, with those 55 strikeouts, the Giants didn’t give themselves enough chances. Velasquez had one sequence from the second through the fifth when he struck out 10 out of 12 batters.

Because that is really more staggering than it sounds, let’s flip through the catalogue:

Gorkys Hernandez: swinging.

Ty Blach: swinging.

Gregor Blanco: looking.

Crawford: swinging.

Evan Longoria: looking.

Brandon Belt: contact (out)

Hundley: swinging.

Pablo Sandoval: contact (single!)

Alen Hanson: swinging.

Hernandez: swinging.

Blach: swinging.

Blanco: swinging.

The Phillies Maikel Franco could've taken a nap during the game and used third base as a pillow.

Yet the Giants did what they wanted in the first three innings. They took their first lead of the series when Gregor Blanco led off the game with a home run. Alen Hanson hit a two-run shot to put them up 3-0 in the second inning.

Then Ty Blach started the fourth with a leadoff walk, and Carlos Santana continued his four-game assault on Giants pitching when he smacked a three-run home run. Santana drove in 13 runs in the series. The Phillies didn't trail the rest of the afternoon.

Blach has done a solid job in the Giants rotation after serving as their Opening Day starter, and he once spun a shutout in this ballpark. But he was not the stopper that this ace-less rotation needed Thursday, and the fact he didn't make it through the fifth added to what has become a chronic nutritional deficit of innings.

The Giants received just 18 innings from their starting pitchers over the four games, and that's a problem when the club doesn't have a dedicated long man who is capable of entering a game and serving as a tourniquet.

Blach and left-hander Derek Holland were ticketed for long relief roles before the final week of the spring. Instead, both of them have spent the year in the rotation. And now that Johnny Cueto joined Madison Bumgarner on the 60-day disabled list, it'll be awhile before the Giants could fathom the luxury of having too many starters.

Cueto was expected to miss six to eight weeks because of his right elbow sprain and the DL move cements it: he cannot be activated any earlier than June 28. The Giants made that procedural move Thursday morning so they could purchase the contract of right-hander Jose

Valdez. And they made that move because they wanted to swap out a fresh arm for right-hander Derek Law, who mopped up 2 2/3 innings while throwing 39 pitches on Wednesday.

While this isn't what the 9-year-olds were chanting about, that's the part that really sucks about a series like this. Bruce Bochy had to treat pitchers like D.J. Snelten and Law like disposable diapers while logging high-pitch outings in games that were as lost a cause as Pickett's Charge.

And at the end of the series, because there were no leads to protect, all the frontline relievers needed work as a result. So Will Smith, Sam Dyson and Hunter Strickland pitched at the end. Tony Watson threw in the bullpen. Who knows if they'll be needed in all three games this weekend at Pittsburgh? Managing a bullpen in a series like this one is like putting your pants on backwards.

It's too bad that Law, a Pittsburgh native, was sent down just as the team is about to begin a series there. The local focus, of course, will be on Andrew McCutchen's first trip as a visiting player to the city where he made baseball fashionable again.

Nobody ever said baseball was fair. That is more true than ever when you make an out on a line drive up the middle.

"That's what we signed up for, you know?" Hundley said matter-of-factly. "If you don't like it, do something else."

Said Crawford: "Hopefully when the season is over, we're not thinking about these four games here."



Oh by the way: Crawford can still do things on defense.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants set franchise mark for strikeouts in four-game sweep

Alex Pavlovic

THE GIANTS INSIDER PODCAST

PHILADELPHIA — How do you sum up the four games the Giants just played at Citizens Bank Park? Bruce Bochy did it in three words.

"Lot of strikeouts," he said, shaking his head.

Bochy muttered the phrase twice more as he sat in his office and tried to digest a **four-game**

sweep at the hands of the up-and-coming Phillies. He did not know his lineup had set a franchise record. He only knew that what he had seen could be summed up cleanly: “Lot of strikeouts.”

The final total, including two in the ninth inning of a 6-3 loss, was 55 strikeouts over four games. That didn’t just break the previous franchise record for whiffs in a four-game series, it absolutely shattered it. The 2003 team struck out 44 times in a four-game series against the Diamondbacks, but they faced Randy Johnson, Curt Schilling and a young Brandon Webb during that trip.

No offense to the Phillies group, but they do not have a couple of Hall of Famer caliber pitchers and a three-time All-Star in their current rotation. The Giants struck out 55 times against Zach Eflin, Aaron Nola, Nick Pivetta, Vince Velasquez and a hard-throwing bullpen. It’s a group not particularly known for piling up strikeouts. The Phillies entered below-average as far as National League staffs go, but they got 17 percent of their season total in strikeouts over just four games.

The Giants have seen a lot of good pitching through six weeks, but Bochy said there was something different about the Phillies. The right-handers all had firm fastballs and came right at Giants hitters. They were aggressive, and the Giants swung and missed through one 95 mph fastball after another. When that wasn’t their downfall, it was good breaking balls.

“They’re all big arms, they all hit 95-plus and have a good secondary pitch,” Bochy said. “(Velasquez) had a good curve today to go with a fastball, and then he was spotting the fastball well. You look at this club and they’ve been playing good. When you’re playing good, you probably have pretty good starting pitching, along with a good bullpen. They’re a good team.”

Whatever this series was, the Giants had better figure out their issues on the flight to Pittsburgh. Jameson Taillon, Chad Kuhl and Ivan Nova are waiting. None have a shiny ERA, but they have the same profile as the pitchers who dominated the Giants this week. Right-handed, good fastballs, a secondary pitch to turn to. For four games in Philadelphia, that profile meant just one thing.

“Lot of strikeouts.”

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants swept by Phillies in four-game series for first time in 36 years

Alex Pavlovic

PHILADELPHIA — The flight from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh is only about an hour. The Giants will need every bit of it -- plus bus rides to and from the airports, and perhaps a long Lyft ride along the Three Rivers -- to wash off whatever this series was.

The Giants went down quietly on the final day, blowing a lead and losing 6-3 to the Phillies. They had not been swept in a four-game series against the Phillies since 1982.

The lineup jumped out to a 3-0 lead on homers by Gregor Blanco and Alen Hanson, but Ty Blach gave up four in the fourth and one more in the fifth and the offense dried up. It was a rough watch, if you were able. Here's what you need to know if you were not ...

--- Blach was pulled with one out in the fifth, becoming the third starter in this series to fail to go five. Derek Holland was the only one who did it, and he went only five. The Giants got 18 innings from their starters in a four-game series. Welcome to life without Madison Bumgarner and Johnny Cueto.

--- Carlos Santana entered the series with a .169 batting average and 13 RBI. He finished with a .191 average and 26 RBI. Santana hit a three-run dinger off Blach in the fourth to put the Phillies on top. He drove in four runs in the opener on Monday and five on Wednesday.

--- Vince Velasquez, who entered with a 5.14 ERA, hit 10 strikeouts with one out in the fifth. That whiff was also the 50th of the series for the Giants. They ended up with 55, shattering the franchise record for strikeouts in a four-game series. The previous mark was 44 by the 2003 team in a four-game series against the Diamondbacks. That Arizona team had Randy Johnson, Curt Schilling and Brandon Webb going in that series. This Phillies team had a bunch of youngsters.

Tampabay.com

Evan Longoria: Rays might be better off leaving Tampa Bay

Marc Topkin

PHILADELPHIA — At a critical juncture when Rays, business and government leaders are trying to secure the long term future of baseball in the Tampa Bay area by building a new stadium, the greatest player in franchise history said they may be wasting their time.

"Honestly, and this is maybe not something I should say, but my gut tells me that the best decision might be to move the team," Evan Longoria said Thursday. "I say that only because I look at the example of the Miami Marlins, and (a new stadium) didn't really solve their

attendance issues. So from purely an attendance standpoint, somewhere else might be better."

Longoria spent 10 years with the Rays before being traded to the Giants in December, investing in several homes and a popular business, Ducky's sports lounge, in the Tampa Bay area during his tenure.

As part of a wide-ranging interview Thursday with the Tampa Bay Times before the Giants-Phillies game, Longoria said he is not convinced that the franchise can be successful in the Tampa Bay market even with a new stadium, noting the annually low, and frequently majors-worst, attendance that leaves Tropicana Field largely empty and quiet on most nights.

"It pains me to say that, but players want to play in a place where you have consistent support," Longoria said. "It's a selfish thing to say probably as a player, but, I don't know, does anyone really want to play in front of 10,000 a night? I don't know. I'm glad I won't have to hear the backlash again this time (for making comments about attendance, as when he played there).

"There are a lot of dedicated Rays fans ... and obviously it would be a shame for those people to lose the team. But you just hope there is consistent fan support, and it historically hasn't been there. I don't know that it's the easiest case to lobby to build a new stadium in the area. It's not a slam dunk."

If there is going to be a new stadium built in the Tampa Bay area, Longoria said his "good answer and realistic answer" is it definitely should be on the Tampa side.

But he did not agree with the Ybor City site that has been identified as the top choice.

"I think they should move across the street from Raymond James (Stadium, on Dale Mabry Highway)," he said. "They should build a stadium that looks just like Houston, or very similar to (Minute Maid Park, which has a retractable roof). You can't play outside there (in Tampa Bay), it has to be a retractable. And obviously it should be grass. If you can do it in Houston you can do it in Florida – you can grow grass in Florida indoors.

"That would be the best thing, I think, just to make it in an easily accessible place where you know 30,000-40,000 people can get in and out easily because they do it for 80,000 at Raymond James already."

Longoria also mentioned the Jeff Vinik-controlled Channelside area of Tampa as an intriguing option. He did not suggest any potential out-of-market destinations if the team, which is signed to play at Tropicana Field through 2027, were relocated.

"I think it has to move to Tampa," Longoria said. "If you're staying in the area, it has to move somewhere over there."