



## SF Giants Press Clips Sunday, July 8, 2018

### San Francisco Chronicle

**Dusty Baker's long gone as Nationals, Bryce Harper struggle**  
**John Shea**

How's that firing of **Dusty Baker** looking for the Nationals these days?

Team ownership said it wanted to go in a different direction, and that mostly has been a downward trajectory. In a division they were supposed to easily win, the Nationals sit in third place behind surprising Philadelphia and Atlanta and are looking up at five teams in the wild-card race.

The Nationals lost 21 of 30 before three stunning wins over Miami. They trailed the Marlins 9-0 Thursday night following a players-only meeting, only to win 14-12, then won Friday on **Mark Reynolds'** walk-off homer and Saturday behind Reynolds' staggering 10 RBIs.

The Nationals ran off Baker after a 97-win season and a second straight division title and figured **Dave Martinez**, who had never managed, would be an upgrade. That might ultimately be the case. For now, this is a team that seriously has underperformed.

The rotation has been knocked around, and the offense hasn't been much of a threat, the Marlins series notwithstanding. And **Bryce Harper** isn't Bryce Harper. His average is way down, his strikeouts are way up and talk about his gazillion-dollar contract-to-be is way premature.

Thoughts of another MVP season have turned to thoughts of trading positions and trading teams. Recently, Harper's simple task of taking grounders at first base has created a buzz, especially in the Bronx, where the Yankees seem set at every position but first base and speculation is running rampant that Harper could join **Aaron Judge** and **Giancarlo Stanton** via free agency.

Martinez doesn't anticipate giving Harper starts at first but said some late-game lineup juggling could find him there. "He's actually not bad," said Martinez, whose team doesn't have a need at the position, unlike the Yankees.

The Nationals' mediocre play has given momentum to talk that they could deal Harper before the July 31 trade deadline, which sounds absurd. Harper is a franchise player on a team that would love to have him longer term, plus he could be the man who leads the Nationals to a playoff run.

But if they collapse in July, maybe it'd make more sense. He homers a lot and walks a lot, but he's hitting .219 with 90 strikeouts in 301 at-bats. Is he pressing with free agency looming and the thought of possibly pocketing \$300 million or \$400 million?

His agent, **Scott Boras**, says no and instead cites Harper's hard-hit ball rate as proof he's not having a bad year. Plus, he's constantly facing exaggerated shifts, which Boras calls "discriminatory" against left-handers. It's true, but other lefties deal with it.

The fact is, Harper and the Nationals haven't played to expectations under Martinez. Entering Saturday, the Nats ranked 20th in the majors in runs scored. Last year they were fifth. They were 10th in ERA. Last year they were sixth. They're 9-16 in one-run games. Last year they were 30-21.

That's not to say the struggles wouldn't have existed under Baker, who was let go after the Nationals were bounced in the first round of the playoffs. But it is true that Baker had a track record of dealing with superstars, from **Barry Bonds** to **Sammy Sosa** to **Joey Votto** to Harper.

Meantime, every time Baker slides over to the Giants' park to catch a game and meet with front-office folks in his new advisory role, he couldn't seem happier. He's away from the 162-game grind, close to home and his business interests and is still glowing from watching his son, **Darren**, play his freshman year at Cal.

It was unfair and unfortunate that Baker was victimized by the impatience and continued shoddy treatment of managers by the Lerner family, which owns the Nationals, but it has been said many times he's cool with where he's at in life, even if he never manages again.

**Around the majors**

- The so-called greatest free-agent class of all time isn't having a walk year for the ages. Aside from Harper's woes, **Josh Donaldson** has had shoulder and calf issues and hasn't played since May. **Clayton Kershaw**, who can opt out of his contract, spent time on the disabled list for the fifth time in five years and has made just 11 starts. **Dallas Keuchel** has an ERA north of 4.00. **Matt Harvey** is a reclamation project in Cincinnati. On the other hand, there's **Manny Machado**, who's hitting .310 with 21 home runs.

- When is a lifetime suspension not a lifetime suspension? When you're a PED-using ballplayer. **Jenrry Mejia's** lifetime ban ended last week when he was reinstated by Commissioner **Rob Manfred**, which seems odd because it's an encouraging sign for future users who'll know that if they get busted three times, which warrants a lifetime ban, they could be cleared in two years. That's not the deterrent we anticipated when baseball adopted a stricter drug policy, including an 80-game suspension for first-time offenders, 162 games for second-timers and lifetime ban for third-timers. Mejia is the only player to hit the trifecta, and now he's free to train with the Mets after the All-Star break and return to the majors in 2019. According to Manfred, Mejia expressed regret and vowed to adhere to the policy in the future. The policy allows for reinstatement after two years, and we're a country of second chances, except in baseball, where there are more.

- No, the Mejia news doesn't affect **Pete Rose**, just as the Supreme Court's decision in May to clear the way for legalized sports betting doesn't affect the Hit King, whose lifetime ban is a sure thing, 28 years and counting. Manfred denied Rose a reinstatement in December 2015 — saying he “has not presented credible evidence of a reconfigured life either by an honest acceptance by him of his wrongdoing ... or by a rigorous, self-aware and sustained program of avoidance by him” — and there's no sign the commissioner will ease up. That's a real deterrent.

- Nice gesture by the Cardinals to give a signed jersey of their 1968 team to **Orlando Cepeda**, who attended Thursday's Giants-Cardinals game, the Hall of Famer's first since his fall in February. Cepeda had to miss the Cardinals' May reunion for the '68 World Series team, which lost in seven games to the Tigers. Obviously, he wasn't forgotten.

## **San Francisco Chronicle**

### **Giants get Samardzija back, but hitting woes resume in latest loss to Cards**

**John Shea**

Brandon Belt got around on a 102.7 mph pitch, fouling it off. Then he alertly took a 102.6 mph pitch that was out of the strike zone.

If Belt was able to see those crazy fast pitches, certainly he could handle the next pitch at a *mere* 100.4, and he did — lining it into center field for a run-scoring single.

“You don’t have much time to see the ball,” the first baseman said.

The at-bat was a rare highlight during a feeble offensive run for the Giants, who fell to St. Louis 3-2 at AT&T Park on Saturday, their fifth loss in six games dropping them into fourth place in the National League West.

The Giants batted .167 and scored 10 runs in those six games.

Jeff Samardzija returned from the disabled list and gave up three runs in five innings, two days after Johnny Cueto was reinstated. It’s the first time this season the projected top three starters (including Madison Bumgarner) are together in the rotation.

But it won’t matter without run support.

“It’s going to take our big guys to get hot and swing the bat like we know they can, and that’s how you put runs on the board,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “We’re not creating a lot of great situations. We had a couple hits with runners in scoring position, but we have to find ways to get on base and put some pressure on them and get our heart of the lineup going here.”

Belt showed positive signs Saturday. He collected three hits and drove in both runs on a sixth-inning double off starter Carlos Martinez and eighth-inning single off setup man Jordan Hicks, whose pitches routinely reach 100 mph plus.

In fact, 17 of Hicks’ 25 pitches reached triple digits, including all five pitches to Belt.

“Mentally, you have to tell yourself not to speed up so much because that’s kind of your automatic reaction,” Belt said when asked how to approach Hicks. “You see somebody like that, mentally you have to calm yourself down and make sure you see the ball just like any other at-bat. I think I was able to do that later on in the at-bat, which gave me a better chance to put the ball in play.”

Belt is the team leader in homers (13) and RBIs (41) but had been struggling like many of his teammates, hitting .220 (9-for-41) in his previous 11 games. He can only hope for Saturday’s output to be the start of a productive run.

“I have to have good at-bats,” Belt said. “I did a little better today. Here recently, I haven’t done that great.”

Both Brandon Crawford and Pablo Sandoval, who is playing regularly for injured third baseman Evan Longoria, are 1-for-17 in the past six games. Andrew McCutchen is 3-for-16 in that stretch.

Asked whether the hitters are pressing, Belt said, “I don’t think so. I don’t get that feeling. I think we need to consciously make an effort to step this up a little bit. It’s getting down to crunch time. We need to make sure we’re playing good baseball. We know what this team is capable of, and we’ll get it back, for sure.”

Samardzija made his first start since May 29, having been shelved with pectoral and shoulder ailments. He showed improved velocity and command and kept the ball in the park through his five innings, the first two of which were perfect.

The Cardinals had just one extra-base hit, Martinez’s third-inning double that bounced over Sandoval’s head, accounting for the Cardinals’ first run. They scored twice more in the fourth on Dexter Fowler’s sacrifice fly and Francisco Peña’s single.

### **San Francisco Chronicle**

#### **Giants moves: Panik to DL, Stratton optioned, d’Arnaud called up, Samardzija reinstated John Shea**

**Chase d’Arnaud** had to respectfully decline an invitation to play in the Triple-A All-Star Game because the Giants called him up from Sacramento on Saturday.

“I’ll take this over that,” d’Arnaud said, smiling.

A day after second baseman **Joe Panik** strained his left groin running the bases, he went on the 10-day disabled list and was replaced by the well-traveled d’Arnaud, 31, who’s with his sixth organization and has played every position in the big leagues except pitcher and catcher.

The Giants also optioned right-hander **Chris Stratton** to Sacramento to make room for right-hander **Jeff Samardzija**, who came off the DL to start Saturday’s game at AT&T Park. Creating space on the 40-man roster for d’Arnaud, pitcher **Hunter Strickland** was transferred to the 60-day DL.

Stratton was the rotation’s odd man out after coughing up 13 runs and 19 hits in his past two starts.

“Not really surprising, with the way I pitched the last couple of starts,” said Stratton, adding he needs to work on his fastball command so his curve would be more effective. “I think it’s actually breaking more this year than previous years, which is weird to say. I think that plays off fastball location.

“I don’t think I’ve done as good a job this year making (pitches) look the same (out of the hand). That’s what you always want to do, deceive the hitters. I’m not a guy who blows it by everybody. To be an effective pitcher, you’ve got to be able to locate and make it look the same.”

D’Arnaud was hitting .292 with a .393 on-base percentage and .915 OPS at Sacramento. He brought along an infielder’s glove, an outfielder’s glove and a first baseman’s mitt.

“It’s amazing,” d’Arnaud said. “I’ve been through this before. I’m just grateful for the opportunity to help the team in a division that’s so close right now.”

D’Arnaud was chosen over infielder **Kelby Tomlinson** to replace Panik.

“He has some experience up here. He won’t be in awe of anything,” manager **Bruce Bochy** said of d’Arnaud. “I’ll use him everywhere.”

There’s more than one reason d’Arnaud is thankful he’s not playing in the Triple-A All-Star Game in Columbus, Ohio, on Wednesday.

“My wife (**Kaitlyn**) was stressing out about taking **Jagger**, our 1-year-old son, on his first flight,” d’Arnaud said. “I told her (about the promotion) yesterday. She was so happy and relieved she won’t have to fly with him to Columbus.”

**Alen Hanson**, who has played multiple positions, will focus on second base with Panik out, opening up a more permanent spot in left field for **Austin Slater**.

**Pablo Sandoval** remains the main third baseman in the absence of **Evan Longoria** (broken hand), who’s due back the first week of August, according to Bochy.

“That’s generous,” Longoria said. “We’ll say Aug. 1.”

### **San Jose Mercury News** **Giants fall flat at plate again in 3-2 loss to Cardinals** **Matt Schneidman**

SAN FRANCISCO — The Giants might want to search McCovey Cove, not for balls they hit there, but for their offense that may have gone under.

They’ve only scored 10 runs in their last six games, and two or fewer in each of their five losses

over that stretch. The Diamondbacks, Red Sox, Nationals and Astros scored more runs in their respective games Saturday than the Giants have in their last six. The result has been a dip ever so close to the .500 mark, as the Giants (46-45) waded into murky waters with the All-Star break approaching.

The latest display of offensive futility came Saturday at AT&T Park in a 3-2 loss to the Cardinals on a day when stellar pitching performances and a standout day at the plate from Brandon Belt went to waste.

“I think we’ve seen a lot of really good pitching. Sometimes it’s hard to diagnose, but facing guys who threw to us really well. Today was no different,” Belt said. “Something we’re having to grind through right now, but we know what this team’s capable of and we will get through it.”

Jeff Samardzija returned to the hill for the first time since May 29, when he left a game against the Rockies after only one inning due to shoulder tightness. The right-hander breezed through innings one and two, but allowed three runs over the next two frames while the Giants’ bats fell stagnant yet again. Samardzija only walked one over five innings, but he allowed seven hits and those three earned runs as the hosts fell behind, 3-0 after five innings.

Samardzija has now allowed multiple earned runs in eight of his nine starts this season, the only outlier his first appearance of the year when he tossed five scoreless innings against the Angels. That outing was also Samardzija’s only win of the season, as he fell to 1-5 after Saturday’s losing effort.

Despite Samardzija’s 1-4 record and 6.56 ERA entering Saturday, he bumped Chris Stratton out of the rotation and down to AAA after Stratton (8-6) allowed 28 hits and 15 earned runs without a win over his last three starts. “I don’t know about pressure,” manager Bruce Bochy said before the game when asked if there was any extra onus on Samardzija to deliver given the success of young starters Andrew Suarez and Dereck Rodriguez in the veteran’s absence.

Samardzija (81 pitches and 53 strikes) didn’t pitch too much worse than Rodriguez did Friday in a 3-2 win, but he needed much better Saturday if the often lifeless San Francisco offense stood a chance.

“These guys come out and prepare every day to play a game,” Samardzija said of the recent lack of hitting. “... We expect a lot out of each other, but we also understand how it goes ... Sometimes you hit some teams with some good pitching along the way and that happens, so

our guys are gonna keep playing, keep pitching, too.”

A rare sign of life came in the sixth, when Belt roped a RBI double down the right-field line that scored Gorkys Hernandez to make it a 3-1 game. Belt shouldered the load again in the eighth, when his base knock to center drove in Alen Hanson to make it 3-2. But it was Belt, and only Belt, doing the heavy lifting for the Giants’ lineup Saturday.

He went 3-for-4 on the afternoon, raising his average to .296 while no other Giant registered more than one hit. Despite eight hits Saturday – the most this series after two Thursday and seven Friday – the Giants left six runners on base and went 2-for-5 with men in scoring position. Even the bullpen did everything it could Saturday when the offense struggled, unlike Thursday’s 11-2 massacre, as Derek Holland (sixth), Sam Dyson (seventh), Cory Gearrin (eighth) and Mark Melancon (ninth) each hurled a hitless inning.

But unlike Game 2 of the series, when veterans Pablo Sandoval and Andrew McCutchen delivered timely at-bats to give the Giants just enough to halt a four-game skid, that go-ahead hit never came Saturday, let alone a game-tying one.

“Right now the offense, we’re having a hard time putting some runs on the board,” Bochy said. “ ... We battled back there in the eighth, but we just couldn’t find a way to get one more.”

### **San Jose Mercury News**

#### **Giants’ Joe panic heads to DL, Chris Stratton sent to minors**

**Matt Schneidman**

SAN FRANCISCO — The Giants knew it was coming, but they announced Saturday morning that second baseman Joe Panik is officially headed to the 10-day disabled list after straining his left groin running the bases on Friday night.

Panik pulled up nearing third on a Gorkys Hernandez double into the left-field corner. Austin Slater replaced him on third, and later moved to left field while Alen Hanson moved to second base.

Panik’s MRI was completed as of Saturday at 11:30 a.m., but the Giants hadn’t received the results yet. Giants manager Bruce Bochy will have an estimate on how long Panik will be out after Saturday’s game.

“Joe’s just a steady player. He’s a good left-handed bat, steady at second, just a solid player,” Bochy said Friday night. ” ... We missed him before. He’s been on the DL, and we have to overcome this.”

Panik is batting .240 this season with four home runs and 14 RBIs. He had been 1-for-15 in San Francisco’s last five games prior to his fourth-inning injury in a 3-2 win against the Cardinals on Friday.

Bochy said Hanson will receive most of the playing time at second while Panik is sidelined.

Other moves the Giants made Saturday morning:

– The Giants purchased Chase d’Arnaud’s contract from AAA.

“We need some help,” Bochy said. “Chase is having a good year down there, made the All-Star team in the PCL. His versatility is gonna come in handy. He played everywhere, first, second, short, third, even outfield. He can swing the bat well and steal you a base. He’s got some experience up here, so he’s not gonna be in awe of anything ... I’ll use him everywhere.”

– Jeff Samardzija was reinstated from the DL, and he will start Saturday against St. Louis. The right-hander owns a 1-4 record and 6.56 ERA this season.

– Chris Stratton was optioned to AAA, so he’s the odd man out among himself, Dereck Rodriguez and Andrew Suarez for the two spots in the starting rotation with Johnny Cueto and Samardzija returning this week. Stratton had an 8-6 record for the Giants in 2018 with a 4.93 ERA. In his last three starts, though, he allowed a combined 28 hits and 15 earned runs without a win.

“We had to create a spot for Jeff. I think if you look at Stratton’s last couple starts, he hasn’t probably been as sharp,” Bochy said. “This gives him a chance to kind of catch his breath and work on a couple things ... He’ll be back up here.”

– Hunter Strickland was moved to the 60-day disabled list.

**MLB.com**

## **Shark dealt loss despite glimpses of greatness**

**Chris Haft**

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Giants saw promise from right-hander **Jeff Samardzija** on Saturday. The results, they realized, must wait for another time.

Samardzija performed about as well as could be expected after returning from right shoulder tightness, which had sidelined him since May 29. He showed hints of the velocity and command that distinguish him when he's at his best, though he absorbed the loss in the Giants' 3-2 defeat at the hands of the Cardinals.

### **View Full Game Coverage**

Samardzija, the Giants' No. 3 starter who had dealt with the shoulder issue since Spring Training, allowed all of St. Louis' runs on seven hits in five innings. Though he totaled just three strikeouts, his fastball reached 96 mph, approaching his peak velocity.

"My timing's coming along," Samardzija said. "I wasn't looking too closely at [velocity]. I knew it was coming out good from warmups. The ball was doing what we wanted it to do."

Samardzija's return, combined with **Johnny Cueto's** comeback and **Madison Bumgarner's** reclaiming of the staff ace's role, enables the Giants to function with their top three starters and should further their efforts to return to the postseason.

"I like to think that we'll get some consistency," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said.

With a little luck, Samardzija (1-5) might have fared better Saturday. Left fielder **Austin Slater** made a diving try and nearly snared **Kolten Wong's** liner to lead off the third inning. Wong came around to open the scoring on what Bochy called a "cheap run," a **Carlos Martinez** double that bounced over third baseman **Pablo Sandoval's** head.

St. Louis added a pair of runs in the fourth, helped partially by an overturned call following a replay review that gave Wong a bunt single.

Meanwhile, the Giants' offense remained stagnant. They have scored 10 runs while losing five of their last six games and are batting .167 (31-for-186) during that span.

"It's going to take our big guys to get hot and swing the bat like we know they can," Bochy said.

San Francisco's offense would have been almost completely barren without **Brandon Belt**. The

first baseman drove in a run with a sixth-inning double off starter Martinez (6-4) and added an eighth-inning RBI single against reliever **Jordan Hicks**, whose fastball routinely exceeded 100 mph.

"I think we're seeing a lot of really good pitchers," said Belt, who collected three of the Giants' eight hits. "Sometimes it's hard to diagnose, but we faced some guys that threw to us really well. Today was no different. It's something we're having to grind through right now. But we know what this team is capable of, and we will get through it."

Belt was asked the inevitable question: Are his teammates pressing?

"I don't get that feeling," he said. "We do need to consciously make an effort to step this up a little bit. We're getting down to crunch time. We need to make sure that we're playing good baseball. ... We'll get it back for sure."

### **SOUND SMART**

Dating back to 2017, the Giants have lost six of their last eight games to the Cardinals and have been outscored by a 48-23 margin. The Giants also dropped to 15-15 in one-run games.

### **HE SAID IT**

"You've seen [Aroldis] Chapman, but it looks like he's taken that up just a notch. That's a big arm there. That's as big an arm as I've seen. That's got to be the biggest arm in baseball right now." -- *Bochy, on flame-throwing Cardinals right-hander Hicks*

### **UP NEXT**

Coming off a hard-luck loss in Colorado, Bumgarner takes on the Cardinals and right-hander **Jack Flaherty** in Sunday's 1:05 p.m. PT finale at AT&T Park. Bumgarner blanked the Rockies for six innings Monday, then allowed three consecutive singles to open the seventh, which prompted a three-run rally. Bumgarner has struggled in his last six starts against the Cardinals, posting a 1-5 mark with a 5.06 ERA.

**MLB.com**

**With Samardzija back, Stratton sent to Triple-A  
Martin Oppegaard**

SAN FRANCISCO -- A Giants pitching rotation that has been in flux much of this season might finally be set. With veteran right-hander **Jeff Samardzija** activated from the disabled list Saturday, righty **Chris Stratton** was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento.

Rookies **Andrew Suarez** and **Dereck Rodriguez** will remain in the rotation.

**View Full Game Coverage**

"We had to create a spot for Jeff," said manager Bruce Bochy. "I think you look at Stratton's past couple starts, he hasn't quite been as sharp, and this gives him a chance to kind of catch his breath and work on a couple things."

Stratton posted a 3.55 ERA in June and leads the club with eight wins, but he labored through his last two outings. He wasn't surprised by the move, which comes on the heels of an eight-run barrage in Colorado on Monday.

"All of the other guys are throwing really well, and I'm just the odd man out right now," Stratton said. "I just got to go down there and continue to work and be ready if they call my name again."

After not allowing a home run in his first five starts of June, Stratton allowed three over his last two outings.

"I just needed to do a better job of locating [the fastball], and I think it'll open up everything else," Stratton said. "More or less just try to work on fastball command and get the breaking balls to work off of that." Bochy is confident he'll call on Stratton again.

"He's pitched some big games for us, important games that we felt like we had to win," Bochy said. "He'll be back up here."

**Smith emerging as primary closer**

**Will Smith** threw a perfect ninth inning in Friday's **3-2 win** to convert his third consecutive save.

"The way he's throwing the ball, he's going to be the guy we use a lot in the ninth," Bochy said. "He's going to need breaks, but we have some other good candidates there."

Smith has a 1.07 ERA and 0.67 WHIP this season.

"After sitting out a full year, it's nice just to be back and be able to play again," Smith said.

"We all kind of consider ourselves closers," Smith added. "We're confident in running whoever out there in the ninth inning. You have closers in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth, one guy just happens to be the last guy to throw."

### **Chase d'Arnaud ready to contribute**

With **Joe Panik** landing on **the disabled list**, the Giants called up Chase d'Arnaud in a corresponding move. In Sacramento, the versatile d'Arnaud made the Pacific Coast League All-Star Game by slashing .292/.393/.522 and playing a host of positions.

"I've been playing just about everywhere," d'Arnaud said. "I've been playing mainly infield and not so much in the outfield so far, but I fully intend to go out there and get a bunch of reads in. I just want to be ready in case they need me to play the outfield, too."

"His versatility is going to come in handy. He played everywhere," Bochy added. "First, second, short, third, even outfield. He can swing the bat well and steal you a base. He's got some experience up here, so he's not going to be in awe of anything."

### **Slater expected to get bulk of playing time in left**

Panik's injury opens the door for **Alen Hanson**, traditionally an infielder, to be the everyday starter at second base. Hanson had also started three of the last four games in left, and his shift back to the infield creates an opportunity for rookie **Austin Slater**.

"I'll play Slater a lot in left field," Bochy said after Friday's game.

## **MLB.com**

### **Panik placed on DL with left groin strain**

**Chris Haft**

SAN FRANCISCO -- The Giants placed **Joe Panik** on the 10-day disabled list prior to Saturday's game vs. the Cardinals with a strained left groin and purchased the contract of infielder **Chase d'Arnaud** from Triple-A Sacramento.

**Jeff Samardzija**, who has been out since May 29 with shoulder tightness, was activated from the disabled list to make Saturday's start, right-hander **Chris Stratton** was optioned to the River Cats and right-hander **Hunter Strickland** was transferred to the 60-day DL.

### **View Full Game Coverage**

Panik was injured while running the bases in the fourth inning of San Francisco's **3-2 victory** over the St. Louis Cardinals on Friday night.

Panik prolonged the fourth inning with a two-out single off Cardinals right-hander **John Gant** that ended a personal 0-for-16 skid. Panik appeared certain to score on **Gorkys Hernandez's** subsequent double to the left-field corner, but Panik pulled up at third base in obvious discomfort.

Panik's injury history thus continued to lengthen. He missed 31 games earlier this year after undergoing surgery to repair a left thumb ligament. He endured back inflammation in 2015 after making the National League All-Star team. Concussions sidelined him in 2016 and 2017, even while he ranked as the NL's toughest hitter to strike out.

Each of San Francisco's starting infielders, except for shortstop **Brandon Crawford**, has been on the DL this season.

"We've had to deal with enough of these this year," manager Bruce Bochy said.

**Alen Hanson** almost certainly will be the primary replacement for Panik, who has compiled a .240/.309/.345 slash line with four home runs and 14 RBIs in 54 games. Hanson possesses a slash line of .273/.305/.530 with six home runs and 24 RBIs in 46 games.

"He'll probably be more comfortable at one position. We've moved him around a lot," Bochy said of Hanson. "That's probably affected him a little bit.

"But we'll miss Joe."

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Samardzija's return overshadowed by another quiet day for Giants' lineup**

**Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO — A few minutes after a quiet loss at AT&T Park, manager Bruce Bochy was asked whether his team could go on a run now that the top three starters in the rotation are together for the first time.

That idea, one the Giants have clung to for much of the first half, misses a key point. This team is not 46-45 because of starting pitching woes. The injuries opened opportunities for Dereck Rodriguez and Andrew Suarez, and the two have exceeded any expectations the front office could have had, not just for rookies, but for starters in general.

This team is not a game above .500 because of starting pitching. It is a game above .500 because of maddening inconsistency, and that has shown throughout a skid that has undone the good work accomplished during a sweep of the Diamondbacks last weekend.

This time, the culprit is the offense. It often is, but this skid is particularly ugly. The Giants lost 3-2 on Saturday. They have scored just 10 runs in their last six games, losing five of them. It doesn't matter what your rotation consists of when you're swinging it like that.

"We've got some guys that aren't in a zone right now, so to speak," Bochy said. "We'll come out of this. You guys have seen how we can put runs on the board."

That's what makes all this so baffling. This group scored nine runs last Sunday to complete a sweep but has barely matched that total in the six days since. The Giants failed to take advantage of Coors Field or a couple of young Cardinals starters, and on Saturday that left them facing a tough test. Carlos Martinez is one of the best in the game, and the Giants got just one run off him.

On the other side, Jeff Samardzija gave up three over five innings in his first start since May 29. The line didn't really matter. What did was that Samardzija felt no irritation in his shoulder, which has bugged him all year. He said his first stint in the big leagues this season was about trying to "will" himself through the soreness. This time, everything was normal.

"The mistakes aren't because of the arm," he said. "They're just because of execution of pitches."

In an odd way, that's encouraging for both player and team. Samardzija's fastball was up a tick from his first go-around this year, but it's clear he's still battling rust. He said he's confident it will get better by the start, and Bochy agrees.

"I thought he was pretty good the first game back," he said.

The Giants will be better with Samardzija and Johnny Cueto back. At the very least, they have bumped others into lesser roles, and Derek Holland looks like a potentially valuable piece as a left-handed reliever. The pitching staff is fine, but it hasn't mattered during this slump.

The lineup couldn't get to Martinez, which left an even tougher task: Trying to come back against Jordan Hicks, the rookie who rests above 100 mph. Brandon Belt did smack triple digits back up the middle to cut the deficit to one, but that was all. Hicks maxed out at 102.7 mph in the eighth, bringing some juice to a ballpark that's been lacking.

"That's pretty impressive, isn't it?" Bochy said. "You see (Aroldis) Chapman, but it looks like (Hicks) is taking it up just a notch. That's a big arm. That's as big an arm as I've seen."

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Giants continue to tumble; Samardzija goes five innings in return to the mound**

**Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO — The other night, when asked about Johnny Cueto's return to the rotation, manager Bruce Bochy paused before noting, "It was okay."

The same could be said of Jeff Samardzija's return on Saturday.

Samaradzija was not particularly sharp, but his stuff was not really concerning, either, coming off a long layoff because of shoulder soreness. He gave up three runs in five innings on a quiet day at AT&T Park. It was okay. The Giants right now, are not. They lost 3-2 to the Cardinals, dropping to 1-5 in the week after a sweep of the Diamondbacks. This is a weird team, the very definition of .500. Here's what you need to know from Day 3 with the Cardinals ...

— Samardzija gave up seven hits, but only one went for extra bases, which was a positive sign. That one was kind of a killer, though. Opposing pitcher Carlos Martinez bounced a double over Pablo Sandoval's head to bring the first run in. The Cardinals got four singles in the fourth while scoring two more.

— Samardzija hit 93 mph a couple times in the first inning, a step up from his previous stint in the rotation this year, when he had trouble getting loose early in games. But the velocity still wasn't quite where it has been in the past. Samardzija threw two fastballs above 94 mph but the rest were in the low 90s. He averaged 92.7 mph with his sinker, a tick up from 92.4 earlier in the season, but just 91.3 mph with his four-seamer.

— Austin Jackson pinch-hit with a runner on first and two outs in the seventh. He struck out. Jackson is 3-for-18 as a pinch-hitter this season with nine strikeouts.

— Jordan Hicks, a rookie who is apparently a right-handed Aroldis Chapman, pitched the eighth for the Cardinals. His fastball averaged 101.1 mph and maxed out at 102.7. Brandon Belt was

not impressed; he fouled off the hardest pitch the Giants have seen this season before smacking a 100 mph sinker into center to drive in the second run of the day.

**NBCsportsbayarea.com**

**Giants place Joe Panik on DL, promote Tripl-A All-Star**

**Alex Pavlovic**

SAN FRANCISCO -- Chase d'Arnaud thought he would be spending the next few days preparing for the Triple-A All-Star Game in Columbus, Ohio. Instead he'll be preparing to help the Giants off the bench.

D'Arnaud, a 31-year-old with big league experience for five other organizations, was called up Saturday morning to take Joe Panik's roster spot. Panik had an MRI on his strained groin in the morning and the Giants are waiting for a timetable of how long their second baseman will be out.

For now, Alen Hanson will get the majority of the starts at second, with d'Arnaud and possibly Austin Slater seeing time against left-handers. D'Arnaud wasn't too bummed about missing his All-Star assignment.

"I'll take this over that," he said. "My wife was stressing about taking Jagger, our one-year-old, on his first flight to Columbus. She was relieved."

The Giants cleared a 40-man spot by putting Hunter Strickland on the 60-day DL, clearing the way for d'Arnaud to take a job usually held by Kelby Tomlinson. The veteran was hitting .292 for the River Cats with 14 doubles and 12 homers. He can be used all over the infield and has played outfield for the River Cats, as well. Manager Bruce Bochy anticipates using d'Arnaud as a pinch-runner, too. He is one of the fastest players in the organization.

"He's got pretty good instincts and feel on the bases," Bochy said. "As you saw in spring training, he doesn't hesitate."

In another move, the Giants sent Chris Stratton to Triple-A to open a rotation spot for Jeff Samardzija, who had a long DL stint with a sore shoulder. Stratton is 8-6 but is coming off a rough stretch and has a 4.93 ERA. Bochy said he had a long talk with Stratton about some adjustments he can make in Triple-A.

"He's pitched some big games here for us, important games here that we felt we had to win," Bochy said. "He came through for us. He'll be back up here."

## **The Athletic**

### **Catching their breath: Two Giants are forced to pause and to reassess their season**

**Andrew Baggarly**

It took a close inspection of Chase d'Arnaud's Giants spring training jersey, and perhaps an unhealthy obsession with fonts, to take notice of it.

The first letter of his last name was not a lowercase D. It was a P turned upside down. And it was not the first time in his baseball life that an equipment manager conspired with the team embroiderer to problem solve in such a manner.

"I keep hoping," said d'Arnaud back in March, "one of these days, I'll get a D with the proper script."

The Giants have some time to work on that. They do not display names on their home jerseys, and they were only three days into a 10-game homestand when they purchased d'Arnaud's contract from Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday. The upbeat and energetic 31-year-old utilityman/journeyman (journtility man?) joined the Giants, his sixth major league club, a few hours after second baseman Joe Panik disappeared into an MRI chamber and onto the disabled list because of a strained groin.

The Giants made one other anticipated move prior to Saturday's 3-2 loss to the St. Louis Cardinals, optioning right-hander Chris Stratton to Sacramento in order to activate starting pitcher Jeff Samardzija from the DL.

Stratton has time to work out a few things, too. He became the obvious choice to be bumped from the rotation for Samardzija, with rookies Dereck Rodríguez and Andrew Suárez both showing a better combination of stuff, command and mound presence.

But this is not a permanent assignment. Giants manager Bruce Bochy held a lengthy meeting with Stratton on Saturday morning and then told reporters that the right-hander wouldn't immediately get penciled into the River Cats rotation. Instead, Stratton will throw a couple of side sessions to work on mechanics and think about altering his pitch sequencing. He will stay rested in case the Giants require a starting pitcher on short notice.

As of this moment, Stratton is the sixth-best starting pitcher in the organization. Who's to say in a week's time, he won't be the fifth best?

The key for Stratton is to either rediscover or redeploy his curveball, which boasted one of the elite spin rates in the major leagues last season. It was one of the league's most effective pitches, too. Opponents hit .116 against it with no home runs. The pitch had a 36.7 percent whiff rate.

This year, opponents are hitting .300 against Stratton's curve. He has allowed three home runs

on the pitch. The whiff rate is down to 23.8 percent.

Stratton has gone over video from last season, including footage from the TrackMan system that allows him to see in super slow-motion both how his forearm pronates and how he is releasing the pitch.

“I think it’s actually breaking more this year than the previous year,” Stratton said.

He’s probably right. His spin rate is up ever so slightly over last season, from 3,105 revolutions per minute (the highest among all major league pitchers who threw at least 50 curveballs last year) to 3,109 this season. The curve is a bit firmer on average, too — from 77.1 mph to 78.1 mph.

So is it about the curveball? Or is it about getting in counts to utilize it?

“It’s a great question,” he said. “I really couldn’t tell you. ... It plays off fastball location. I don’t think I’ve done as good a job making it look the same. That’s always what you want to do. I’m not a guy who blows it by everyone. I’ve got to make it look the same.”

Is more break making his curve easier to pick up out of his hand? A check of Stratton’s lateral and horizontal release points do not appear to show any great difference from last year. But major league hitters are the best in the world, and there are hundreds of ways they can decipher a dip in arm speed or a squeeze of the glove or a subtle deviation of pre-pitch routine. And even if they can’t spot a tell, there are dozens of scouts who are compensated to look for those things.

It might be as simple as this: Stratton is throwing a heck of a lot more fastballs while the league is trending more and more toward pitching backward. He has thrown 56.3 percent four-seam fastballs this season, primarily working up in the zone. Last year, he threw just 40.2 percent fastballs. The biggest reason for that increase? He has all but abandoned a cutter that he threw 17.5 percent of the time last year.

Throwing strikes hasn’t been an issue. Stratton is coming off a start at Coors Field in which he threw 75 strikes out of 104 pitches. He isn’t compounding the damage with leadoff walks. But with Samardzija and Johnny Cueto rejoining the rotation, he did not pick an ideal time to have a three-start run in which he gave up 28 hits over 15 2/3 innings.

Stratton has a 4.93 ERA in 18 starts but clearly retains some of the elite tools to be a very good major league pitcher. A step back should give him the chance to refine his pitch mix and help him gain an understanding for how best to attack hitters and be an asset for this team again in the second half.

Stratton is not the only player who might benefit from a forced timeout and a reassessment. Panik also has time to rethink a frustrating season.

His groin injury is the latest setback in a year that began with such fanfare yet has careened into disappointment. He hit home runs as the Giants opened with a pair of 1-0 victories at Dodger Stadium. He has hit one home run since then.

The bigger concern is all the other hits that Panik isn't getting to fall. He is batting .240/.309/.345. He only has seven doubles. And like Stratton, he is operating against league-wide trends.

In a season when major league players are on track to finish with more strikeouts than hits for the first time in history, Panik is by far the toughest player to fan in the National League. He has just 13 strikeouts this season. Take every NL player with 200 at-bats and Panik's strikeout rate of 5.8 percent is nearly half that of the next toughest player to fan (the Braves' Nick Markakis, at 10.3 percent).

Yet all those balls in play are not helping Panik, or the Giants. His BABIP is .238 – far below the league average of .294.

Here's the weird part: Panik is doing more than playing pepper with the second baseman. He is making the hardest contact of his career. His 87.0 mph exit velocity is better than any previous season and yet his actual numbers are nowhere near his expected batting average of .303.

Some of this is bad luck, as Bochy will be quick to tell you. But ask the manager if Panik should make some adjustments – laying off pitcher's strikes, for example, or taking a more aggressive two-strike approach – and he agrees to a point.

"You don't want a hitter to take away from his strengths," Bochy said. "But if you look at the numbers and the results, I think you should take a look at (making changes). It can be an aberration. But when your extra-base hits and your slugging aren't where you want them to be, and not Joe in particular, but any hitter, then it's worth rethinking your approach."

The Giants didn't have MRI results on Panik to provide a timeline for his return, but it's expected to be several weeks at least. In the meantime, Alen Hanson will become the starting second baseman against right-handers with d'Arnaud mixing in against lefties. Austin Slater also could see spot work at second base against lefties if Bochy chooses to use d'Arnaud to give Brandon Crawford a rest at shortstop.

Unlike Crawford, Brandon Belt, Evan Longoria and Buster Posey, Panik does not have the security of a long-term contract. He will begin to be a lesser bargain as he goes into his second year of arbitration, and for whatever you think of defensive metrics, they haven't been as kind to him. He is 27 and should be in his prime, but the next three months could be pivotal as the Giants develop their long-term plans for the middle infield.

Samardzija is not like Stratton or Panik. He is 34 years old and has made his money in this game. He isn't seeking to reinvent himself or re-evaluate his skills but merely to be healthy enough to perform.

His first start back from the DL was ... well, pretty good.

"Overall, I thought it was a pretty good job, a pretty good effort," Bochy said. "He came out with good stuff. They did a pretty good piece of hitting on the 0-2. He just reached out and knocked in the third run. But overall, I thought it was pretty good."

Samardzija was starting for the first time since May 29, when he lasted one inning at Coors Field before it was obvious that he wasn't able to get loose. At that point, he had a 6.56 ERA in eight starts while trying to pitch through shoulder tightness.

So it was a good sign when Samardzija hit 93 mph in the first inning against the Cardinals while retiring three batters. While there is nothing stellar about three runs in five innings, the Cardinals tallied just one extra-base hit against him — and that was a chopper that the opposing pitcher, Carlos Martinez, served over third baseman Pablo Sandoval.

"When I throw 90 to 100 pitches, the strength will get up there and the velo will go up, too," Samardzija said.

Whether it's borne out of trust for a veteran pitcher or a desire to establish his trade value, or both, Samardzija will get every chance to re-establish himself in the coming weeks.

It always begins with getting a chance, doesn't it? Consider Belt. He made the most of his opportunity and he has established himself as an everyday presence no longer bound by Bochy's whim to get another right-handed bat in there against a lefty. All you had to see was Belt's at-bat in the eighth inning — when he flicked away a 102.7 mph sinker from Cardinals reliever Jordan Hicks before sending a 100.4 mph sinker up the middle for an RBI single — to appreciate what kind of hitter he's become.

But opportunity is a luxury that the game does not afford everyone, and never affords any one player for too long. The innings and plate appearances necessary to improve and adjust often disappear and never reoccur.

That is why d'Arnaud was the most grateful soul in the Giants clubhouse on Saturday, happy to occupy a big league locker one more time. The club called him up over Kelby Tomlinson because Sacramento manager Dave Brundage had raved about his play in recent weeks, and because he offered a bigger stick at a time when the Giants are thirsting for runs.

Three days earlier, d'Arnaud posted an Instagram video of himself walking through Target,

wearing an American flag one-piece suit with a box of Pampers under each arm and getting heckled by a kid on a skateboard. A couple days before that, he posted a snippet of a music video with Johnny Cueto as one of his backup dancers. This is all to suggest that the Giants are not adding a sourpuss to their clubhouse.

Before his sudden promotion, d'Arnaud was headed for the Triple-A All-Star Game in Columbus, Ohio. Rest assured, he will find a way to deal with the disappointment of missing it. His wife, Kaitlyn, was bracing herself for her first solo commercial flying adventure with their 1-year-old son, Jagger. That flight with a connection to Columbus instead became a drive up Interstate 5 from Los Angeles.

"Yesterday I got the news and I felt calm," d'Arnaud said. "This is my sixth organization I've been through this before. I'm just grateful for the opportunity."

As anyone would be.

**ESPN.com**

### **Max Muncy's journey from out of MLB to out of this world Buster Olney**

The Keller High School baseball team, of Keller, Texas, generally follows the same daily schedule. As a result, Lee Muncy and his son, Max, could venture an educated guess as to when practice would end and a batting cage would open for the Muncys' use. "We didn't want to interfere with what they were doing," Lee Muncy recalled.

Once they got their turn, usually in the early evening, Max Muncy would take about 200 swings -- four buckets of baseballs, roughly 50 balls per bucket. Then Max would throw and catch and field a few grounders, trying to stay fresh in case somebody called to offer him a job in pro ball. But as each day passed in those first weeks of April 2017, Max chatted with his father about what else might be next. He was 26 years old, after all, and had been released by the Oakland Athletics at the end of spring training. Maybe he would go back to Baylor, he said, to finish that last year of courses and get his degree in business. Maybe he would try independent ball. Fifteen months later, Lee and Midge Muncy structure their days around the schedule of the Los Angeles Dodgers -- an afternoon nap to prepare for a 10 p.m. Eastern time start -- because their son got a job. Max didn't have to go back to college to pursue another line of work, and he no longer must wait his turn for a round of swings at a high school cage. He's playing regularly for the Dodgers, and the other day, Clayton Kershaw referred to him as "the best hitter in baseball right now" -- in earnest.

Over the past 34 days, Muncy is batting .319, with a .479 on-base percentage and a slugging percentage of .749. He has blasted 17 homers in his past 41 games, and it's possible that on Sunday, Max will be part of the National League All-Star team unveiled on ESPN at 7 p.m. ET.

"It's unbelievable. It's surreal," Lee Muncy said. "When he was first called up [by the Dodgers], we thought, 'OK, we hope he gets to pinch hit.' Then we went to hoping he would get to platoon. Now we hope he's playing more."

"We always thought he could hit 20 homers in a season. For him to do that [already], that's surprised us, along with everybody else."

It even surprised Farhan Zaidi, who was responsible for the belated phone call that brought Muncy into the Dodgers' universe late in April 2017. Zaidi, the Dodgers' general manager, previously worked with the Oakland Athletics under Billy Beane and knew Muncy from that organization. After playing three years at Baylor, Muncy was a fifth-round draft pick of the Oakland Athletics in 2012. He advanced to the big leagues for brief appearances in 2015 and 2016, hitting .195 in 96 games and 215 at-bats, but the Athletics released Muncy at the end of spring training in 2017.

Under Andrew Friedman and Zaidi, the Dodgers have built layers of functional depth in their farm system, creating safety nets, and Muncy was a good candidate for that, in spite of his first unremarkable appearances in the majors. He established a history of good at-bats, with relatively few strikeouts, a good contact rate and a willingness to take walks, and he played multiple positions. Zaidi and the Dodgers signed Muncy to a minor league deal, and he spent last year with Triple-A Oklahoma City, batting .309 with a .414 on-base percentage.

Along the way, Muncy joined the wave of players who have adjusted their approaches in an effort to lift the ball. Like Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner, Muncy is something of an ideal candidate for adaptation because of his hand-eye coordination and ability to make contact. He explained in the visitors clubhouse Saturday that the changes were not really to his swing but to the mechanics setting up his swing and allowing him to hit underneath the ball. Max Muncy has tried different swings his whole life. Lee Muncy is an ardent fan of baseball, and years ago, he absorbed an observation by Duke Snider about left-handed hitters -- that they enjoy the natural advantage of being a step or two closer to first base than right-handed hitters. He encouraged Max, naturally right-handed, to swing from both sides of the plate. Max smiled when Snider was mentioned and said, "That's my Dad's story. I can't remember a time when I didn't hit left-handed."

Lee remembers a very young Max standing in front of a TV imitating the stance of whatever hitter happened to be on the screen: perhaps the left-handed Ken Griffey Jr. or the right-handed-hitting Jeff Bagwell. For a time in his early life, Max modeled what he did at the plate after Jim Thome, with the point of the bat in the direction of the pitcher and the socks exposed high.

Now, many years later, there are probably young Dodgers fans standing in front of televisions and imitating Max Muncy, who has tried to fend off thoughts of whether he could be selected as an All-Star, little more than a year after he was out of baseball and running out of options.

"It's been pretty crazy," he said. "I've been enjoying it a ton."

The Indians are one of the teams linked to Manny Machado, the Baltimore shortstop currently being marketed by the Orioles. But given Cleveland's place in the standings, an expensive trade for Machado could be construed as malpractice for a front office of a small-market team with limited resources. (And the Indians have long had one of the best and most progressive collections of adept baseball executives.) The Indians' lead over the worst division in baseball is in double digits, and the Twins and Tigers, the second- and third-place teams, are much closer to being sellers than contenders. If Cleveland were to spend to get Machado, the first time he would have any opportunity to be a difference-maker would be in October, in a division series against the Astros or Yankees or Red Sox. If the Indians were eliminated in that round, it would mean they surrendered coveted prospects for the sake of 15 to 20 Machado postseason plate appearances.

When they made an aggressive trade for Andrew Miller in the summer of 2016, dealing Clint Frazier and Justus Sheffield for the lefty, the Indians passed on Aroldis Chapman because he was a rental. Miller, on the other hand, was under contract for 2017 and 2018. The Indians are riding a parallel course right now: They are digging into the market for relievers who could help their weak bullpen this year and into 2019, after Miller and Cody Allen depart as free agents. That sort of expenditure makes a whole lot more sense than Machado for the Indians, who could lurk as dangerous October sleepers. While other American League contenders -- the Red Sox and Yankees in the East, the Astros and Mariners in the West -- might have to push to win their respective divisions and tax themselves down the stretch, the Indians almost certainly will have the luxury of handling their pitching conservatively, properly resting Corey Kluber, Trevor Bauer, Carlos Carrasco and Mike Clevinger for the postseason. The Indians also have time to tinker with their bullpen mix and, similarly, rest relievers as needed, a luxury the Yankees, Red Sox, Mariners and Astros might not have in September.

- The one scenario in which an Indians acquisition of Machado would make more sense would be if the market for Machado never develops in the way the Orioles anticipate and they are forced to take a bad deal rather than settle for draft-pick compensation. That is what happened with the Rangers and Yu Darvish last season, and it might be that five or six teams will monitor the Machado situation with the hope that a modest offer will be enough to get a deal done in the last hours before the July 31 trade deadline.
- For years, the Orioles have driven other teams to distraction during trade talks because other clubs sometimes haven't been sure whether an offer would stand or whether a player involved would pass a physical or who was making the decision. But in recent weeks, rival evaluators

have been privately complimenting the work and process of the Orioles, saying they seem especially focused and prepared, with spot-on knowledge of what they want in return for Machado (and perhaps others). The sense of other teams is that the Orioles are prepared to move Machado relatively soon, maybe a couple weeks before the July 31 trade deadline. The Dodgers and Diamondbacks are regarded as two of the most ardent suitors, according to sources, with the Brewers, Braves and a handful of other teams hanging around the edges of the conversations so far.

- The Yankees have continued conversations with the Blue Jays about lefty J.A. Happ, with the two sides haggling over the price tag. But despite the struggles of Sonny Gray, it could behoove the Yankees to wait a little bit longer before finalizing a move for a starting pitcher because as the July 31 deadline gets closer, it's possible that other high-end starting pitchers will suddenly become available, giving Yankees GM Brian Cashman more alternatives to consider.
- Giancarlo Stanton was the NL MVP in 2017 in close voting, but the field of candidates in 2018 appears to be completely wide open, from the Braves' Freddie Freeman to Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado to Cubs infielder Javier Baez to a couple of starting pitchers, Washington's Max Scherzer and Philadelphia's Aaron Nola. Maybe Giants shortstop Brandon Crawford or even Paul Goldschmidt or the Nationals' Bryce Harper could be in the conversation, despite terrible first-half slumps. The award is up for grabs.

### **Baseball Tonight podcast**

A special Call To The Legends podcast: Randy Johnson weighs in on the current practice of pulling starting pitchers before they're exposed to the opponent's lineup for a third time.

**Friday:** Dick Williams, the head of baseball operations for the Reds, on the team's progress, hitting philosophy, forthcoming managerial search, Matt Harvey and Billy Hamilton; Karl Ravech on the Nationals' comeback and Dexter Fowler's relationship with the Cardinals; Jessica Mendoza discusses Matt Kemp, and the future of Shohei Ohtani; and Paul Hembekides on Bryce Harper's marketability.

**Thursday:** Keith Law goes through the Manny Machado market, team by team, and reviews the Carlos Gomez dugout explosion; Chelsea Janes of the Washington Post on the Nationals' struggles; Sarah Langs plays The Numbers Game.

**Tuesday:** Braves play-by-play man Chip Caray on Atlanta's season, his father Skip's influence and career advice, and his grandfather, Harry Caray; Jerry Crasnick on Dexter Fowler and a baseball moment between friends Max Scherzer and Rick Porcello; and Sarah Langs.

**Monday:** Tim Kurkjian on Sonny Gray, David Price and their struggles and on Shohei Ohtani; conversations with Aaron Hicks and Andrew Benintendi; and Todd Radom's weekly quiz. And today will be better than yesterday.