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San Francisco Chronicle

Sandoval's walkoff single in 11th lifts Giants on night of rarities

John Shea

A cleanup hitter bunted for a single. A pitcher who had hardly swung a bat in his life got a hit. A utilityman scored from first base on a botched pickoff attempt.

And two players dressed up as wrestlers to campaign for a teammate to make the All-Star team.

Say this for the 2018 Giants: They'll surprise you.

On Monday night, the Giants beat the Cubs 2-1 in 11 innings on Pablo Sandoval's walk-off single off Pedro Strop.

The Giants wasted a one-out Hunter Pence triple in the 10th, but not Andrew McCutchen's one-out single in the 11th. McCutchen advanced to third on Brandon Belt's single to right, and Brandon Crawford was intentionally walked to load the bases for Sandoval.

The Cubs used five infielders, and all played in. Sandoval fell behind 0-2 on two foul balls before lashing an opposite-field single to left, giving the Giants the series-opening win on a night of rarities in China Basin.

Belt, the cleanup hitter, led off the second inning with a bunt single, perhaps the easiest way in the world to beat a shift, and Andrew Suarez smacked a third-inning single for his first major-league hit. He's 1-for-28.

Alen Hanson one-upped everybody with an astounding 270-foot jaunt in the fifth inning, scoring from first base on a botched pickoff attempt.

"That's what speed does," manager Bruce Bochy said. "It's nice to have speed out there like that, and we needed it."

Kyle Hendricks' throw to first got past Anthony Rizzo, and Hanson took off. Taking advantage of second baseman Javier Baez sluggishly retrieving the ball in the right-field bullpen and throwing to the plate, Hanson seemingly picked up speed as he dived in ahead of catcher Willson Contreras' attempted tag. Rizzo was charged with the error.

"I think I surprised them when I kept on going home," Hanson said through interpreter Erwin Higueros, "because the normal play is staying at third when Baez had the ball in his hand."

There's nothing station to station about Hanson, whose speed is a welcome addition to a team that has been known to need a few hits to score a run. Hanson proved he can take three bases on a muffed pickoff bid, and it was the only way the Giants could score off Hendricks, who pitched into the ninth inning.

"That was huge for us," Sandoval said. "If you fall asleep with that guy, he's going to score."

On the other hand, Hanson's inability to complete a double play cost the Giants a run. Subbing for injured second baseman Joe Panik, Hanson took a feed from Crawford, who fielded Addison Russell's grounder in the hole. Hanson threw high to first base, enabling Ian Happ to score in the third inning.

It was the lone run charged to Suarez, who pitched six innings and gave up three hits but walked four. It was the sixth straight start that Suarez yielded two or fewer runs.

Crawford made a couple of stellar plays, bare-handing Albert Almora Jr.'s high chopper and throwing him out at first, thanks to Belt's scoop. And Crawford also gloved Russell's grounder up the middle and threw him out at first.

Hours before the game, Belt became the focus of an amusing video featuring Pence and Derek Holland, who dressed as wrestlers — the Ballot Brothers — in a bit to encourage fans to vote the first baseman to the All-Star team.

Belt is among five players on the final-vote ballot, which will run online through Wednesday.

“It’s pretty funny, pretty awesome,” Belt said. “We have some great teammates here. That was way more than I ever expected.”

Pence and the shirtless Holland flashed wrestling belts — get it? — and roared about Belt’s candidacy. At one point, Pence held his belt upside down, and Holland might have stolen a couple of Pence’s lines, but it still had high entertainment value.

“I think there was a script that we kind of followed,” Pence said. “Holland didn’t totally follow it. He started reading mine, so I was trying to feed off of that. He killed it. We did it in one take, actually.”

The point was made.

“Belt has definitely played outstanding in this first half,” Pence said. “We wouldn’t be where we are without him.”

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants’ Buster Posey will miss All-Star Game with hip ailment
John Shea

Giants catcher Buster Posey was selected to his sixth All-Star Game but will sit out with right hip inflammation, which has taken a toll on his swing and run production.

Posey will receive a cortisone shot in his hip after Sunday’s game and rest during the four-day All-Star break, manager Bruce Bochy said.

“It’s an honor to be selected to the All-Star Game,” Posey said. “That’s not something you take for granted. It’s a decision I didn’t come to lightly. Making that decision with the training staff and medical staff, I felt that was going to be in my best interest and hopefully in the best interest for the team as well.”

Bochy said the club discussed for a month the option of having Posey sit out the break.

“He’s been playing with it. You could tell. All of you can tell,” Bochy said. “It’s bothering him. He’s been a warrior through this and had missed some time. ... The break will serve him well.”

Posey, who has played 75 of the Giants' 93 games, felt hip soreness during the three-city trip beginning in Houston in late May, and it has lingered. He said it bothers him both hitting and catching.

"A lot of guys have stuff that bugs them," Posey said. "It's one of those things, some days it's better than others, and you try to have more good days than not."

Posey is hitting .280 with five homers and 27 RBIs. He has two hits in his past 21 at-bats and three RBIs in his past 26 games.

Bochy said the ailment is a reason for Posey's subpar power numbers.

"Without question," Bochy said. "This game's hard enough when you're healthy. It's the right hip, too. If you can't quite get it to fire like you normally do, sure, it's going to affect your hitting, your throwing, all facets of the game."

Cubs catcher Willson Contreras will start for the National League All-Stars after finishing about 250,000 votes ahead of Posey, who was selected in the player balloting.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants young and old contribute to walkoff win over the Cubs

Kerry Crowley

SAN FRANCISCO—Each time they step on the field, the Giants are showing their age.

On some days that's a scary thought for a club with a band of 30-something position players, but on others, it's a reminder that a farm system that wasn't supposed to produce much of a crop has provided the club with something to chew on.

While some are nearing the end of their careers and others are at the very beginning, third baseman Pablo Sandoval is busy reviving his. The 31-year-old was the hero Monday as his walkoff single in the bottom of the 11th plated Andrew McCutchen to send the Giants home with a 2-1 series opening win over the Chicago Cubs.

"He's got the ability to get the bat on the ball and that's what you need there," manager Bruce Bochy said. "He did it well. He had some good swings. The swing before he just missed keeping that ball fair but we needed it. We were about out of pitching."

Sandoval showed up to San Francisco last summer looking for one final chance to play again after washing out with the Boston Red Sox. Now, he's providing a spark for a Giants club that continues to benefit from his endless energy and enthusiasm.

"All the guys here, the 25 guys, we've got one goal and that's to try to play every day hard," Sandoval said. "I come here every day to have fun and I play the game the right way so I set my job and I came here to have fun."

The aging veterans and bright young talents both made the news Monday, as Bochy announced catcher Buster Posey will miss next week's All-Star Game to deal with a nagging hip injury while a pair of 25-year-olds kept things interesting against the Chicago Cubs.

Instead of traveling to his sixth career All-Star Game, the Giants catcher will stay at home and receive a cortisone shot in his right hip to heal an injury that he's dealt with for much of the season.

"It's an honor to be selected to the All-Star Game and it's not something you take for granted," Posey said. "It's a decision I didn't come to lightly. Making that decision with the training staff just felt like that was going to be in my best interest and hopefully the best interest for the team as well."

At 31, Posey is showing the normal signs of wear and tear for a player at his position. But the 25-year-old left-hander he threw down signs for looks fresh and ready for a bigger stage.

Rookie Andrew Suárez continued an impressive streak Monday, recording his sixth straight start in which he's allowed two runs or fewer. Suárez didn't have excellent command against the Cubs, but he battled through six innings of one-run ball that turned eventful thanks to the player with the fastest legs behind him.

"It definitely helps and gives me confidence," Suárez said. "I didn't really have my stuff as you could see with the four walks. But keeping that lineup to just one run definitely says a lot."

All but one position player from the Giants' Opening Day lineup is at least 30 years old, and the only regular still in his twenties is second baseman Joe Panik, who's on the disabled list with a groin injury.

Panik's replacement, Alen Hanson, is 25 and could double as a track star.

With the Giants trailing 1-0 in the bottom of the fifth, Hanson blended heads-up base running and electrifying speed with a handful of defensive miscues by the Cubs.

After an Anthony Rizzo error allowed Pablo Sandoval to reach first, the lightning-quick Hanson took Sandoval's place following a fielder's choice. With Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks concerned about Hanson's ability to steal a base, he threw over to first to keep the Giants second baseman close to the bag.

Hendricks' pickoff attempt sailed past Rizzo's glove and rolled up the first base line, allowing Hanson to jet around second base and over to third. Thanks to a relaxed effort from second baseman Javier Báez to pick up the ball in the right field corner, Hanson made like a sports car rolling through a yellow light and sped through the third base intersection.

"When I saw that Báez was pretty far away, that's when I took it upon myself and figured that I could score from third," Hanson said through translator Erwin Higueros.

By the time Báez's throw reached home plate, Hanson had tied the game with a smooth headfirst hook slide past catcher Willson Contreras.

"That's what speed does," Bochy said. "You don't see that very often at first base and it was a close play at the plate, but it was nice to have speed out there like that."

Hanson is the fastest Giant since pinch-runner extraordinaire Darren Ford dazzled with his speed in 2011, but his ability to get on base and play regularly makes him far more valuable.

However, it was his mistake in the field back in the top of the third that allowed the Cubs to take a 1-0 lead.

With runners on first and third, Suárez induced a potential inning-ending double play ball, but Hanson's throw to first was too high for Brandon Belt to corral which allowed the first run of the game to score.

Suárez rebounded with three more scoreless innings before turning the game over to the bullpen on a night when he once again proved he should be in the Giants' rotation for the long haul. The bullpen built upon Suárez's strong work as five relievers combined for five innings of one-hit ball to stymie the Cubs and help San Francisco pull within 3.0 games of the first-place Arizona Diamondbacks.

San Jose Mercury News
Buster Posey to miss All-Star Game to heal injury
Kerry Crowley

SAN FRANCISCO—Giants catcher Buster Posey was selected to his sixth All-Star Game, but he won't be traveling to Washington, D.C.

Instead, Posey will stay at home and receive a cortisone shot in his right hip after Sunday's game to heal a nagging injury that he's dealt with for much of the season.

Posey was voted onto the National League All-Star team as a reserve by fellow players, but he'll skip the festivities and attempt to get healthy in time for the start of the second half of the season.

Manager Bruce Bochy said the Giants have discussed the possibility of Posey receiving a cortisone injection for the last month and were hoping he would be healthy enough to play regularly through the first half before he needed more time off.

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"It's flared up on him and he missed some time because of it not too long ago and our hope is to make it through this week and then we can give him this injection," Bochy said. "Hopefully four days off will get this thing cleared up."

Posey missed two games against the Chicago Cubs at the end of May due to hip soreness and rarely caught three games in a row during the month of June.

"All of you can tell that it's been bothering him," Bochy said. "He's been a warrior through this and he had missed some time earlier."

Bochy said he believes Posey's power has been zapped by the hip inflammation, which helps explain why he has five home runs and his lowest slugging percentage (.412) since 2011.

"This game is hard enough as I always say when you're healthy and it's the right hip, too," Bochy said. "When you can't quite get it to fire like you normally do, sure it's going to effect your hitting and your throwing, all facets of the game."

Posey's replacement for the All-Star game has not been announced.

MLB.com

Panda foils Cubs' packed infield for walk-off

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- With a bat in his hand, **Pablo Sandoval** almost always is the right man in the right spot.

Very little fazes Sandoval when he's hitting, which he proved again Monday night by slicing a tiebreaking single to left field in the 11th inning to give the Giants a 2-1 victory over the Cubs.

View Full Game Coverage

With Sandoval facing **Pedro Strop** with the bases loaded and one out, the Cubs employed a five-man infield, defying Sandoval to drive a pitch to the outfield. As it turned out, the Cubs could have stationed their entire 40-man roster in the field and it wouldn't have mattered. With three infielders planted between second and third base, Sandoval lined Strop's 0-2 pitch to left field to score **Andrew McCutchen**, whose one-out single off **Steve Cishek** (2-1) launched the winning rally.

After **Brandon Belt** singled, the Cubs intentionally walked **Brandon Crawford** to set up a potential force play at any base.

"He's our best hitter right now," said Sandoval, who wasn't at all offended by Chicago bypassing Crawford. "I just dropped everything from my mind. I got the opportunity and I took advantage of it."

"You can't let that affect your at-bat," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said of the extra infielder. "And I don't think it affected Pablo at all."

The Giants were definitely affected by **Alen Hanson**'s mad dash home from first base, which tied the score in the fifth inning. It interrupted the dominance of Cubs starter **Kyle Hendricks**, who permitted five hits in 8 1/3 innings, and motivated the Giants.

"I was pumped, for sure," Giants starter **Andrew Suarez** said.

With one out in the fifth, Hendricks tried to pick off the speedy Hanson. The toss eluded first baseman **Anthony Rizzo**, who was charged with an error. Second baseman **Javier Baez** appeared unaware that Hanson was racing for home as if this were the postseason. Hanson beat the throw with a headfirst dive.

"That's what speed does," Bochy said. "You don't see that very often at first base."

Suarez wasn't involved in the decision but recorded his fourth quality start in his last five outings. The left-hander yielded one run and three hits in six innings while striking out five. Suarez lapsed only in the third inning, when **Ian Happ** doubled and scored on **Addison Russell's** fielder's-choice grounder.

Suarez benefited somewhat from the Cubs' unfamiliarity with him.

"We hadn't seen him before," Rizzo said. "We didn't know much about him."

Suarez felt fortunate, since he didn't consider himself at the top of his game.

"My command wasn't there tonight," said the rookie, who walked four. "I had to keep grinding to throw strikes."

SOUND SMART

Left-hander **Tony Watson** has not allowed a run in 21 consecutive home games, which is the second-longest streak in a single season in Giants history. Left-hander Javier Lopez set the record of 25 games in 2013.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Crawford strengthened his All-Star credentials with a typically (for him) sparkling play in the 10th inning. He grabbed Addison Russell's grounder barehanded, knowing that he probably couldn't throw out the fleet Cub by transferring the ball from his glove to his hand. In this case, Crawford was immediately ready to throw, and he retired Russell by an eyelash.

UP NEXT

Continuing to reacquaint himself with his craft, Giants right-hander **Johnny Cueto** is scheduled to make his second start since being idled for two months by an elbow sprain. Cueto, who's scheduled to throw Tuesday's first pitch at 7:15 p.m. PT, has been slightly more stingy at night during his career. His lifetime ERA under the lights is 2.82, compared to 3.24 in day games. The Cubs will counter with left-hander **Jose Quintana**, who's 0-3 in three career starts against the Giants.

MLB.com

Hanson startles Cubs with daring dash home

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- Taking matters into his own hands, or more accurately, his legs, **Alen Hanson** ended the Giants' offensive futility in Monday night's **2-1, extra-inning victory** over the Cubs by scoring from first base on a pickoff play gone bad.

Having forced out **Pablo Sandoval**, Hanson was aboard with one out and San Francisco trailing, 1-0, when Cubs starter **Kyle Hendricks** attempted a pickoff. The throw eluded first baseman **Anthony Rizzo**, who was charged with an error. As the ball skittered away from the pursuing Cubs, Hansen sped to third, then headed home as **Javier Baez** retrieved the ball near the Cubs bullpen.

View Full Game Coverage

"I turned around at second base and [looked at] the third-base coach [Ron Wotus] that called me to come over to third," Hanson said through interpreter Erwin Higueros. "I figured I could score from third as long as [Baez] didn't make a perfect throw."

Hanson dove headfirst toward the plate and beat catcher **Willson Contreras'** tag to score the tying run.

MLB.com

Belt getting 'awesome' support in Final Vote

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- Looking more like experienced comedians than ballplayers, left-hander **Derek Holland** and outfielder **Hunter Pence** combined their talents Monday to **produce a video** endorsing their Giants teammate, first baseman **Brandon Belt**, in the Camping World MLB All-Star Final Vote.

VOTE BELT: 2018 Camping World MLB Final Vote

View Full Game Coverage

Pence donned a sleeveless T-shirt while Holland wore no shirt at all as they portrayed professional wrestlers urging fans to vote for Belt to capture the National League's last roster spot for the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard, which takes place Tuesday, July 17,

at 4:30 p.m. PT on FOX. Belt won the Final Vote in 2016. The campaign may be working, as Belt ranked second in Tuesday's voting update.

Belt couldn't help but be amused by the video.

"It's pretty funny," Belt said. "It's pretty awesome. I've got some great teammates here. That was way more than I ever expected, so it's pretty cool."

Belt confessed that awaiting the vote totals was "a little stressful, but it's fun. You have to enjoy it."

Asked whether he thought the appendicitis that sidelined him in June hampered his All-Star candidacy, Belt replied, "It's definitely possible that I could be in a better situation than I am now. But it happened and there's nothing I can do about it."

Also, the Giants joined forces with the Seattle Mariners to boost each other's get-out-the-vote efforts. The Mariners are striving to get infielder **Jean Segura** onto the American League squad. Both clubs used Twitter, among other means, to convey their messages.

"Hello. We are fans of good Belts," the Mariners and Segura tweeted. The Giants and Belt reciprocated with, "We are fans of nice Jeans."

Fans can cast votes for the final player on each league's roster -- on computers, tablets and smartphones -- exclusively online as part of the **2018 Camping World MLB Final Vote**, as well as via the MLB At Bat and MLB Ballpark mobile apps, until Wednesday at 1 p.m. PT.

Then on Tuesday, July 17, while watching the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard live on FOX, fans can submit their choices for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet with the 2018 All-Star Game MLB.com MVP Vote.

The 89th Midsummer Classic, at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C., will be televised nationally by FOX Sports; in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS; and worldwide by partners in more than 180 countries. FOX Deportes will provide Spanish-language coverage in the United States, while ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide exclusive national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network, MLB.com and SiriusXM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage.

For more information about MLB All-Star Week and to purchase tickets, visit **AllStarGame.com** and follow @MLB and @AllStarGame on social media.

MLB.com

Ailing hip to keep Posey out of All-Star Game

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- Giants catcher **Buster Posey** will receive a cortisone shot to treat persistent right hip discomfort and will miss next Tuesday's All-Star Game presented by Mastercard, manager Bruce Bochy announced Monday.

VOTE BELT: 2018 Camping World MLB Final Vote

View Full Game Coverage

Posey, 31, was selected by fellow players to appear in his sixth Midsummer Classic. Instead, he'll receive the shot -- most likely, shortly before or after the Giants' final game prior to the All-Star break this Sunday. The Giants then would hope that Posey's pain diminishes before San Francisco opens the season's second half at Oakland on July 20.

Posey expressed disappointment over missing a chance to join baseball's elite.

"It's an honor to be selected to the All-Star Game," Posey said. "It's not something I take for granted. It's a decision I didn't come to lightly."

The Cardinals' **Yadier Molina** was named to replace Posey on the National League roster. Cubs catcher **Willson Contreras** is slated to start behind the plate for the NL in the 89th Midsummer Classic. The event will be played at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, July 17, at 4:30 p.m. PT and will be televised nationally on FOX; in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS; and worldwide by partners in more than 180 countries. FOX Deportes will provide Spanish-language coverage in the United States, while ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide exclusive national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network, MLB.com and SiriusXM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage.

Bochy said the ailment has "without question" diminished Posey's power. The NL's Rookie of the Year in 2010 and Most Valuable Player in 2012 entered Monday's series opener against the Chicago Cubs with a .412 slugging percentage, which would be a career low for a full season. As a right-handed batter, the .285-hitting Posey would struggle to drive pitches into the gaps or over walls with a sore right hip.

Posey, who entered 2018 with 128 homers, has five in 313 plate appearances this season. Having spent most of his career occupying the third or fourth positions in the batting order, Posey has increasingly hit second, as he did for the 24th time this season Monday against the

Cubs.

Posey is on pace to appear in 130 games, which would be a personal low for a full season. He would catch 109 games at his current pace, a total he has fallen short of in two of the previous three seasons.

Posey was expected to discuss the issue with reporters after Monday's game.

For more information about MLB All-Star Week and to purchase tickets, visit **AllStarGame.com** and follow @MLB and @AllStarGame on social media.

The Athletic

A decade of catching begins to accumulate as Buster Posey will miss the All-Star Game with hip soreness

Andrew Baggarly

So now you know about Buster Posey's sore hip.

The Giants' catcher and franchise anchor is not the sort to call attention to his injuries. He removes his ice packs before he leaves the trainer's room. When his teammates take batting practice, his frequent absences go unnoticed and unremarked upon. He often trades those extra hacks, and saves the energy it would take to produce them, for another half-hour in the whirlpool or on the massage table or doing his core and lower body program, which he tries to knock out in the morning at the team hotel but not when the previous night's game lasted 13 innings.

Sometimes, Buster just needs that time to rest.

"He's one of the best guys on our team about trying to take care of himself," Giants head athletic trainer Dave Groeschner said. "He saves his energy and also uses his time wisely so he can be productive out there. He's really cognizant of how his body feels and what he needs to do each day to get through nine innings tonight."

Or what his body needs to get through the final 2 1/2 months of the season.

You know about Posey's hip because Giants manager Bruce Bochy was forced to explain why his 31-year-old catcher was selected to his sixth National League All-Star team but will not make his sixth appearance. Rather than crisscross the country to Nationals Park, Posey will receive an anti-inflammatory injection in his aching right hip and spend the break resting and recovering.

You know about the hip. But there is also the thumb. And the lower back. And the constant foul tips, including the scary ones off the mask (two Monday night, by the way). And that 16-inning game in Miami last month, with accompanying soreness that does not reset after one day off.

And there is the decade of accumulation. That counts, too. Blizzards eventually melt. Wear and tear never truly leaves a catcher's body.

Take one sequence from the Giants' 2-1, 11-inning victory over the Chicago Cubs on Monday. Posey was catching his sixth pitcher of the night. It was the 11th inning. He took a vicious foul tip off the mask from Willson Contreras. The next pitch produced the third out, and Posey was due to lead off the bottom of the 11th. He had to unclip his catcher's gear and grab a helmet. Did you forget that Major League Baseball uses a countdown clock between innings?

He took the first pitch, probably because he was still catching his breath and clearing his head. Then he took a wavy swing that produced a pop-up.

So many of the fans in attendance noticed only what happened last. So many of them groaned.

Suddenly, Posey's five home runs begin to make sense. So does his career low .780 OPS, which ranks a pedestrian seventh out of 12 NL catchers with at least 200 plate appearances.

"It's hard to quantify anything like this," said Posey, asked how much his hip and other assorted vagaries of catching have affected his offensive numbers. "A lot of guys have stuff that bugs them. It's hard to say. It's one of those things that some days are better than others. I try to have more good days than not."

There have been more bad days of late. And so Posey will treat the All-Star invitation as a round of batting practice. He knows he must make smarter use of the time.

"It's not a decision I came to lightly," he said. "And in making that decision with the training staff, I just felt it was going to be in my best interest."

Posey contributed behind the plate in countless unseen ways while catching rookie Andrew Suarez and five relievers in a one-run victory Monday night. But he also went 0 for 5 at the plate, and the days are less frequent when he will win a game with his bat.

The Giants needed a different offensive hero to claim a series-opening victory over the Cubs and their legions of invading fans. Pablo Sandoval waved the cape, stinging a bases-loaded single and then absorbing the contents of Derek Holland's celebratory water jug.

Sandoval's fourth career walk-off hit followed singles from Andrew McCutchen and Brandon Belt and an intentional walk to Brandon Crawford. Cubs manager Joe Maddon used the two-outfielder alignment and overpopulated his infield. With one out, Sandoval's line drive off Pedro Strop cleared every one of their heads.

This was a game won with youth and athleticism, too. Suarez would have thrown six shutout innings if not for second baseman Alen Hanson's hesitation as he tried to turn a double play. Hanson showed no such hesitation in the fifth when he danced to draw an errant pickoff throw and then left the ballpark breathless as he sprinted around to score from first base.

And the Giants bullpen? Oh, if only Bochy had this crew to throw at the Cubs in the 2016 NL Division Series. (The Giants' reaction signing that winter, Mark Melancon, looked like his ground-ball churning self Monday night. If he can do that more often, and eventually on back-to-back days, he could make a massive contribution down the stretch.)

Posey was the link between all six pitchers, and perhaps he will need to rest Tuesday as a result.

Yes, Posey is taking a few more days off this season, and for the first time, it is perceptible. He is on pace to start 107 games behind the plate, which is 11 more than last season, but fewer of his “rest days” are coming as a first baseman. If his usage pattern holds, he would start a total of 124 games in the field. He started 126 games last year, 133 in 2016 and 140 in 2015.

Is it a concession to his age, or to the frequency of nagging injuries?

“I think both,” Bochy said. “It’s where he’s at in his career, but it’s also how important it’ll be to have him down the stretch. When we’ve gotten there, we’ve grinded him pretty hard. Once we get to that stretch run, you’re able to call on him a little bit more.”

The offensive catcher is such a rare luxury, but it requires a devil’s bargain. A catcher must expend so much of his time, physical energy, mental acuity and overall vivacity behind the plate. Sometimes, there isn’t much left by the time he goes from squat to batting stance.

Sometimes, there isn’t much left after a decade.

“You know, catchers, the wear and tear catches up with them a little sooner than a position player, so the longevity usually isn’t there,” Bochy said. “It’s hard to catch 20 years, you know? Even (Johnny) Bench went to third base. Some of those guys, it’s amazing what they did in their careers like Yogi Berra or Carlton Fisk. The number of games they caught, that’s always amazed me, some of these guys, their durability behind the plate.”

Posey ranks among the greatest offensive catchers in baseball history. He is one of only four players to catch at least 850 games and hold a career average above .300 and a career slugging percentage above .470. The other three — Mike Piazza, Mickey Cochrane and Bill Dickey — are in the Hall of Fame.

Unlike Piazza, Posey owns a Gold Glove, too — plus three World Series rings as a testament to his game-calling skills.

“He’s a complete package, which is a rarity when you match it with defensive skills,” Giants executive vice president Brian Sabean said. “There aren’t a whole lot of them who have done both at a high level for as long as he has.”

The Giants must be satisfied with the devil’s bargain because they struck another one last month, when they used the second overall draft pick to select an offensive catcher, Joey Bart, out of Georgia Tech.

On a night when Posey backed out of the All-Star Game because of injury and went 0 for 5, Bart hit a grand slam for Salem-Keizer in the short-season Northwest League. It was his fourth home run in five games there.

Posey and Bart are on career paths that will intersect sooner or later, and while a night like Monday could appear to quicken the boilers, the reality is that Posey will remain this team’s heart and soul behind the plate for at least another year.

“I’m not sure this is a red flag yet,” Sabean said. “He has come through his difficulties to get out there as much as possible. There’s great communication between him and Boch and the training staff. It’s part of the bargain. It goes with the job description.”

Groeschner waves a hand when told that the complaints about Posey’s offensive recession or his more frequent days off are topics occupying more bandwidth on social media.

“Those people are dead flat wrong,” Groeschner said. “He’s one of the toughest guys on this team, not just physically but mentally. We’ve tried to be strategic early on. When we get to September and we’re close, he’s going to play a lot. He’ll still need a day off here or there, but he’ll be out there like he has in the past.”

“He understands what he means to the team. He and I and Boch have been strategic to this point to get him ready for that. And yeah, he is a year older, too, and we’ve got a great backup catcher in Nick Hundley and we’ve got to take advantage of that.”

Although Bochy and Sabean are bullish that Posey’s body and swing will rebound whenever he does move to first base — “If anybody could transition up the line to become more like his younger self from a run production standpoint, you’d bet on him because of his bat-to-ball skills,” Sabean said — Posey cannot say for certain.

He is big on evidence, and while he has much better career numbers as a first baseman, he said he hasn’t played enough games to constitute a meaningful sample.

Besides, that is a discussion for another day. For now, Posey is focused on how he must prepare to contribute behind the plate. That continues to be the smartest use of his time.

“I’ve done the opposite where I try to muscle through this or power through that and from my experience, that generally doesn’t work,” Posey said. “Less seems to be more when you’re trying to play through something.”

“It could be a foul tip off your shoulder, it could be a foul tip off your hands. Those are the little things and you’ve got to be able to adjust, not only day to day, but a lot of times during the game as well. You’ve got to figure out how to make your swing work the way you want it to, even if you’re a little banged up.”

Posey paused and considered how he answered the question. He usually keeps his answers brief. This time, he had more to say.

“You know, I kind of hesitate because I don’t want to come across as excuse oriented,” he said. “It’s hard for me to answer that because it’s my position and it is what it is.”

“You just go do it.”

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Hanson's wild dash keeps Giants around long enough to get a walk-off

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO — Take a spin through Major League Baseball's social media channels and you'll find plenty of Javier Baez, the talented Cubs second baseman who has quite a bit of showmanship in a game that still often discourages it. Baez's tags at second base and swim-move slides are made for the Instagram era, and in a big spot Monday night, it appeared Baez was trying to bait Alen Hanson into a supporting role in his latest highlight.

Hanson took off from first on an errant pickoff throw in the fifth inning, with the Giants trailing by a run, and easily cruised into third. Baez took his time getting to the ball as it kicked into the visiting bullpen, and he took his time getting it back in. Several Giants, in the aftermath of a 2-1 walk-off win, said they had no doubt that Baez was trying to get Hanson to run into an out at the plate. He got burned by a player with a similar skillset.

Hanson turned on the jets, beating the throw and Willson Contreras' tag with an acrobatic slide that tied the game. On one of their best nights of the year, the Giants would go on to win it on Pablo Sandoval's bases-loaded single in the bottom of the 11th. All the good work the team did in the late innings was made possible by a mad dash from the newest breakout infielder.

"You can't take that play for granted with Alen Hanson on base," first baseman Brandon Belt said. "He's got balls, too. You've got to have balls to pull that off."

Fortitude helps. So, too, does speed. Hanson is the kind of player the Giants haven't had in years, and his natural skillset was matched by decision-making pushed by third base coach Ron Wotus all season. Wotus waved Hanson hard around third. It was at that moment that everyone froze for a split-second, and then Hanson, already well on his way around the bag, took off.

"He has tremendous speed and his speed is a game-changer," Wotus said. "He can do things other guys can't do."

The dash set the stage for the more traditional. Andrew Suarez, who has a 2.00 ERA over his past six starts, allowed just one run while keeping up with Kyle Hendricks, who was at his best. Tony Watson had an easy seventh. Mark Melancon showed his best fastball and cutter of the season in the eighth. Will Smith stranded the go-ahead run in the ninth to get the game to extras.

"Outstanding, weren't they?" manager Bruce Bochy said.

The Giants could not get their seventh walk-off in the 10th despite a one-out triple from Hunter Pence. But an inning later, Andrew McCutchen, Belt and Brandon Crawford — who sparkled defensively — loaded the bases. Sandoval lined a single into left to win one of the more complete games of the year.

The final knock came just in time. Bochy was already doing the math, knowing something most of the rest in attendance did not. Derek Holland is likely starting on Tuesday to give Johnny Cueto an extra day of rest, so the bullpen was short. Despite that, the manager was happy to be doing calculations in extra innings. With the way Hendricks threw, this was a game that could have been over in two and a half hours. Hanson had other ideas, extending the night with a play you almost never see. He said he had never scored from first on a pickoff play before, but he had no hesitation as he rounded third.

“I said, ‘I can score from third as long as he doesn’t make a perfect throw,’” Hanson said. “He did (but) I was able to slide in and score.”

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Sandoval capitalizes on Giants’ dominant pitching, walk off Cubs

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO — After a series of moves, the Cubs chose not to face All-Star starter Brandon Crawford in the bottom of the 11th inning on Monday night. Pablo Sandoval made them pay.

Sandoval lined a single to left with the bases loaded, clinching a 2-1 win over the Cubs on an exciting first night of a three-game series. The walk-off win was the seventh of the season for the Giants, who had one of their best all-around pitching nights of the season.

Andrew Suarez was sharp and Kyle Hendricks threw it back to his Cy Young push, but this one would be decided by the bullpens. The Giants looked to be in control when Hunter Pence hit a one-out triple in the bottom of the 10th, but Chase d’Arnaud and Steven Duggar struck out. An inning later, Andrew McCutchen and Brandon Belt got the lineup in gear, and Sandoval won it after an intentional walk of Crawford.

Here’s what else you need to know...

— Alen Hanson scored from first on a wild pickoff throw. Yes, that sentence is correct. Hendricks’ throw to first in the fifth inning went down past the visiting bullpens and Hanson cruised into third base. He hesitated as he passed the bag and Javier Baez, perhaps the game’s most exciting runner, paused for a second. That was all it took. Hanson broke for home and just barely beat the throw, diving in with a headfirst slide.

— Suarez was without his normal command, but allowed just one run over six innings. He has a 2.00 ERA over his last six starts and hasn’t allowed more than one run since June 18.

— Suarez was hitless in 26 big league at-bats before bouncing a single up the middle in the third inning. Hendricks left a 1-0 slider across the plate and Suarez hit it into center as his fellow pitchers, lined up on the dugout rail, went nuts. Suarez appeared to possibly maybe crack the slightest hint of a smile.

— Duggar had a sprint speed of 30.2 feet/second on a fielder's choice. That's the ninth-fastest recorded time by a Giant this season.

San Francisco Examiner

Pablo Sandoval does it again, driving in game-winner in 11th against Cubs

Ryan Gorcey

AT&T PARK — When Pablo Sandoval signed with the San Francisco Giants in July of 2017, it was after a failed two and a half seasons with the Boston Red Sox. He had burned some bridges on his way out of the Bay Area, and wasn't welcomed back with open arms by a fan base that once adored him.

After becoming an overnight cult hero with a lauded pitching appearance in a blowout loss early in 2018, an improbable start at second base and three weeks of taking over for the injured Evan Longoria, though, Sandoval had finally begun to rehabilitate his image.

On Monday, a day where Brandon Belt's All-Star candidacy got a boost, when Alen Hanson scored from third on a pickoff throw, and Andrew Suarez got his first big league hit while shutting down a troublesome lineup, it was Sandoval who took center stage with a walk-off single in the 11th inning of a 2-1 win over the Chicago Cubs.

"Having fun was one of the things I was looking for," Sandoval said. "I had it here ... I came here to have fun."

After Cubs reliever Pedro Strop walked All-Star shortstop Brandon Crawford to load the bases with one out in the 11th, Chicago employed a five-man infield. Strop got ahead 0-2 on Sandoval before the Giants' third baseman poked an 85-mph slider over third base and down the left field line, bringing home Andrew McCutchen with the winning tally. It was the third big hit in the last two days that Sandoval has had with a two-strike count.

"It's nice to have a guy up there who's comfortable with two strikes," said Bochy. "He's got the ability to get the bat on the ball, and that's what you need there ... We needed it. We were about out of pitching."

After going 1-for-11 to start the month, Sandoval, who drove in five runs despite a sprained left thumb on Monday, has gone 6-for-19 over his last four games. That's quite a bit of fun.

Despite having nowhere near his best stuff, rookie starter Suarez was brilliant for the third start in a row, going six innings and striking out five while walking four and allowing three hits.

"It gives me confidence, for sure," Suarez said. "I didn't really have my stuff, as you can see with the four walks, but keeping that lineup to just one run, definitely says a lot."

Over his last 19 innings, Suarez has gotten a grand total of two runs of support, while allowing just three. Monday was his sixth straight start with fewer than two runs allowed.

“He threw a beauty,” Bochy said, “especially towards the end there, when he was at the end of his rope ... There’s a savvy about the kid. He’s got good poise, keeps his composure. He’s got a good focus on him right now.”

Chicago (51-37) took an early lead in the third after a leadoff double by Ian Happ, a single by Albert Almora, Jr., and a would-be double play grounder by Addison Russell, which forced a high turn throw to first from Hanson.

In the fifth, Hanson reached on a fielder’s choice, before a wild pickoff throw by Kyle Hendricks sailed wide left of Anthony Rizzo at first. As second baseman Javier Baez headed into the Cubs bullpen to pick the ball up, Hanson hesitated as he rounded third, and Baez looped the ball back to the infield. As soon as Hanson saw the throw, he turned on the jets and scored, tying the game.

“I think that he thought that I wasn’t going to try to score from third,” Hanson said through an interpreter. “I saw that he was just taking his time, and when I saw that he lowered his guard, that’s when I took advantage of that fact and scored from third.”

While Hendricks — who came in with a 4.27 ERA — held San Francisco down over 8 1/3 innings, striking out eight, Suarez got backup thanks to some All-Star-caliber work from Final Vote candidate Belt.

Belt, San Francisco’s cleanup hitter, bunted against the shift for a single in the second inning and made three stellar plays with the glove. He snared a liner from Rizzo in the fourth, dug out a pick on a low throw by Sandoval for the second out in the fourth and in the seventh, ranged back up the line and at a full gallop, fielded an Ian Happ grounder and fired back to reliever Tony Watson for the second out of that inning.

The Giants (48-45) got a pair of 1-2-3 innings from Watson and Mark Melancon, who looked as good as he has since returning from the disabled list, getting three ground-ball outs. Will Smith struck out two in the ninth, and worked around a two-out double down the left field line by Ben Zobrist, shutting up a sizable and vocal chanting Cubs contingent in the lower bowl by getting David Bote to ground out to short.

“[Watson and Melancon] are outstanding, aren’t they? I thought Mark’s outing tonight was his best, talking about stuff, velocity, everything,” Bochy said. “Smitty, he gave up the double, but he found a way to get that last out. That’s how you win games like this.”

After Cubs reliever Steve Cishek allowed a one-out triple to Hunter Pence in the 10th, he fanned both Chase d’Arnaud and Steven Duggar to strand the winning run 90 feet away.

“That’s a tough match-up for our hitters, but that next inning, Pablo came back and came through for us,” Bochy said.

Notebook

... Ty Blach was the Giants’ long man, had the need arisen, during Monday’s game. After him, Bochy was going to use rookie Ray Black for an inning, and then Sam Dyson, before perhaps dipping into the starting rotation to throw Jeff Samardzija for an inning.

“Once it gets close, you start checking on guys who can [throw],” Bochy said.

... While going through his options, Bochy let slip that the Giants will soon start Derek Holland — who cut a pro-wrestling-style promo with Pence before the game, in support of Belt’s All-Star candidacy. It’s possible that he throws on Tuesday to push Johnny Cueto back a day.

... Suarez got the first hit of his major league career in the third, a 1-0 single back up the middle. He was presented with the ball after the game, and said he was more proud of his hitting than he was his pitching on the evening.

“My hitting, for sure,” Suarez said. “I mean, my command wasn’t there today, so yeah, definitely my hitting.”

ESPN.com

MLB hitters explain why they can't just beat the shift

Jerry Crasnick

As Major League Baseball's competition committee debates the impact of defensive shifts, lots of people have theories on why hitters have been slow to adjust and are falling into a depressed, statistically impaired state as hot shots to the right side routinely result in outs. The list of interested bystanders includes commissioner Rob Manfred, who recently observed that hitters haven't adapted to the challenge in the manner baseball had anticipated.

"It was common thought, 'People are going to learn just to go the other way,'" Manfred told reporters at the MLB owners meetings in June. "But the fact of the matter is the human element took over, and what they decided to do was go over the top rather than go the other way."

Agent Scott Boras has labeled shifts "discriminatory" to left-handed hitters. Come November, when Bryce Harper files for free agency, Boras will have a better idea of whether teams in the market for a nine-figure, power-hitting corner outfielder share that opinion.

Are hitters simply too stubborn to adjust, or are the answers more complex? The potential hazards of a hitter going outside his comfort zone to beat the shift were evident during a recent Nationals-Blue Jays game, when Washington's Matt Adams suffered a broken finger while squaring to bunt against a vacant left side of the infield. As hitters also can attest, teams routinely pitch to the shift. A pitcher is not going to throw soft stuff away to a left-handed hitter with the entire left side of the infield uninhabited.

ESPN.com recently asked three lefty hitters who face varying percentages of shifts for their takes on the state of affairs. How do they try to attack defensive shifts, and do they think MLB can take any steps to address the problem -- if there is, indeed, a problem?

Daniel Murphy, Nationals

(Murphy was out until June because of knee surgery. He went 3-for-9 against the shift in his first 22 games this season.)

"Strikeouts are way up, so getting a base hit is more difficult than ever because of the velocity and how good pitchers are now. You see velocity and secondary weapons for four or five at-bats a game.

"It's really difficult to get three hits in one inning. If you hit three singles, it's one run. If you get a walk and a double, you might get one run. If you get a double and a single, you might get one run. So my goal is to touch second base every single time I step to home plate. If I'm not mistaken, somewhere in the neighborhood of 7 percent of ground balls go for extra-base hits. If I want to touch second base, I'm not going to be able to hit the ball on the ground. Pulled ground balls are not really base hits in this league anymore.

"When baseball started, they set players up in the positions they did because that's where they thought the ball was going to be hit. You had the first baseman and the third basemen at the corners, the middle infielders and three outfielders. There was no rule that you had to have five guys on the dirt, a catcher and three outfielders. They just set it up that way because they said, 'Hey, this is where we think we're going to hit the ball.' It's the same thing that's being done now."

Daniel Murphy

"I haven't really stolen bases for five or six years. If I drop a bunt down, what am I gonna do? I'm stuck at first base, so what I've done is ask our ballclub to get two more singles, or I've asked someone else to hit a double. If 7 percent of balls on the ground go for extra bases, someone is probably going to have to hit one in the air to score me from first. So what I've tried to do is hit a double every single time because it's really difficult to get three hits.

"If I'm not mistaken, the level of production goes: strikeout, popup, ground ball, fly ball, line drive. The production comes mostly from fly balls and line drives, so that's what we want. I'm trying to hit a line drive first. And if I miss, I hit a fly ball. Ground balls, popups and strikeouts aren't going to give you anything. It's not necessarily rocket science.

"I'm not trying to hit it in one specific place. If I look up, and they're full-shifting me, and I only have one defender in the 5-6 hole where the third baseman plays, I have to let the ball get a little deeper. But the pitchers are pretty good, and that's now a foul ball. I'm really never in the business of trying to aim for a certain area because I have to be perfect, and I'm not perfect.

"If any of us could control hits, we would get more of them. But you can't. You can only control the process.

Defensive Runs Saved Due To Shifts

MOST	FEWEST
Rays, 24	Phillies, -9
Yankees, 23	Pirates, -1
Diamondbacks, 21	Nationals, 0
Royals, 19	

"When baseball started, they set players up in the positions they did because that's where they thought the ball was going to be hit. You had the first baseman and the third basemen at the corners, the middle infielders and three outfielders. There was no rule that you had to have five guys on the dirt, a catcher and three outfielders. They just set it up that way because they said, 'Hey, this is where we think we're going to hit the ball.' It's the same thing that's being done now.

"The question everybody has to ask themselves is, 'Why are we playing the game? What is the goal of the game?' I think it's to score more runs than the other team. That seems to be what organizations are trying to do. They're going to set guys up there because they think, 'This is going to help us prevent runs' and 'We're going to try and attack the baseball in this way because we think it's going to help us score runs.' That's the name of the game. I think this has been a long time in the making. It's actually been quite impressive to watch how quickly teams have adapted to the data they've got.

"The reason they shift you in the places they do is because that's what your batted ball data says. I heard Joe Maddon say, 'You have three choices: You can try to hit it and beat the shift. That's going to give you a single, but now you're doing something against what you're best at, so the defense wins. You can hit into the shift, and the defense wins. Or you can try not to let the infielders catch the batted ball. No ground balls and no popups. Try to stand on second base.' That's Option C."

Kyle Seager, Mariners

(Seager has been shifted against 69.4 percent of the time this season, according to Baseball Savant. That's the 13th-highest rate in baseball. He's hitting .235 against the shift.)

"It happens so many times now, where a ball would have been in the 4-hole [between first and second base], but that isn't there anymore. Or you hit a line drive up the middle, and the guy is standing there. It's kind of the new norm.

"When I debuted in 2011, shifts were nonexistent. Now when they play you straight up, it almost looks strange out there. That's another reason why guys are trying to get the ball in the air. Ground balls through the infield aren't getting through now. The people upstairs who are putting players in these positions are smart. They know all the numbers, and there's obviously a reason why they do it.

"If you're facing David Ortiz, and he bunts over there and gets a single, he may have just done us a favor. If we let Ortiz beat us with a bunt as opposed to him hitting a homer, maybe that's OK."

Kyle Seager

"I used to try to manipulate my swing to hit balls to the left side of the infield and create some easy hits. I'll still try to do it at times, depending on where guys are positioned, but a lot goes into it. It depends on the situation in the game. How many outs are there? Are there runners on base? If there are two outs and I get into a 2-0 count and I hit a little ground ball to the shortstop hole, that probably wasn't as productive a team at-bat as it could have been if I ended up hitting a double somewhere.

"I've tried to bunt a few times, and I've had a few successes. But the third baseman is usually still in there for the first two strikes, so the bunt is not as big a factor as it could be. Again, it's dictated by the score and the situation in the game.

"It goes back to the question of 'How can I help the team the most?' Am I going to help the team the most over the course of the season hitting weak ground balls to shortstop [for a single]? I'm not a guy who steals a bunch of bases, so you're relying on a few hits to score me. If I try to drive the ball and I hit a double, it only takes one hit to score me. I definitely understand how people can look at it and say, 'Man, just hit a ball to the left side.' But there are a lot of different arguments to it.

"We've had meetings and talked about this stuff. If you're facing David Ortiz, and he bunts over there and gets a single, he may have just done us a favor. If we let Ortiz beat us with a bunt as opposed to him hitting a homer, maybe that's OK.

"As far as baseball doing something to change the shifts, that's for people smarter than me to

decide. I just go out there and play where they tell me to play."

Matt Carpenter, Cardinals

(Carpenter been shifted against 295 times this season -- fifth-most in the majors behind Chris Davis, Joey Gallo, Justin Smoak and Curtis Granderson. He's batting .270 vs. shifts.)

"Think about which hitters teams shift against. They shift on guys who drive the ball. By trying to hit a ground ball to short -- which is the one spot on the infield where you would be able to beat the shift -- that's exactly what they want you to do.

"There's this whole narrative of 'Why don't guys just hit ground balls to short?' The answer is: (a) It's not that easy and (b) it's the complete thing you've taught yourself your entire baseball career to avoid. If a guy has a chance to hit a homer and a double, and he goes up there trying to slap a ground ball to short, the other team is perfectly fine with that.

"I think it gets blown out of proportion when people say, 'Just hit a ground ball to short.' You can't just take a 98 mph cutting fastball in on your hands and do that. Let's just say I sell out tonight, and I try it four times. The likelihood of me hitting four straight ground balls to short and ending up 4-for-4 are very slim. If I succeed once or maybe twice, at best I'm going to go 2-for-4 with two singles, where if I just play the game, I might go 2-for-4 with a homer and a double. It makes no sense to me.

"Just think about this: When there's a runner on third base and less than two outs and the infield is playing back, every hitter in baseball knows that all you have to do is hit a ground ball *anywhere*, and you score the run. And that success rate is still super small. That play is easy, and it gets screwed up all the time. Guys can't hit a ground ball when all they have to do is hit a ground ball to score a run.

"As defenders, when a guy comes up and hits a ground ball to short [to beat the shift], we still go to the same place the next time. It doesn't change anything. You look at the guys they shift on, and they're paid to drive the ball. People aren't doing it against Billy Hamilton and guys like that.

"I think it gets blown out of proportion when people say, 'Just hit a ground ball to short.' You can't just take a 98 mph cutting fastball in on your hands and do that. Let's just say I sell out tonight, and I try it four times. The likelihood of me hitting four straight ground balls to short and ending up 4-for-4 are very slim. If I succeed once or maybe twice, at best I'm going to go

2-for-4 with two singles, where if I just play the game, I might go 2-for-4 with a homer and a double."

When you look at where we're headed in baseball, the one alarming thing is the number of balls that are put in play. It's hard now -- period. Everyone is throwing 95 mph-plus with movement. Every bullpen has guys out there doing that. So just putting the ball in play and not striking out is a challenge in itself. If you already have all these disadvantages against the hitting side of the game, I wouldn't be opposed to getting back to playing the game the way it was always played, where you have two guys on the left side of the infield and two guys on the right side of the infield.

"I think the easiest way to do it would be for guys to play where they've played for all the time the game has been around. Two guys on the left side. Two guys on the right side. You have a designated area where the shortstop, third baseman, second baseman and first baseman all go, and you play there. That would be the simplest way. Is it gonna happen? I don't know. But if you're looking to help even out the advantage that pitchers have over the hitters, that's the only way to do it."