



SF Giants Press Clips Saturday, March 10, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants' Buster Posey has three hits in return
Henry Schulman

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — It could be July in Pittsburgh, March in Arizona or December in Istanbul. Seeing Buster Posey go 3-for-3 with two doubles is going to hearten the Giants.

That goes double when they know Posey is contending with an injury to the left ankle that was shredded and repaired in 2011 after his home-plate collision with Scott Cousins.

Posey's perfect afternoon at the plate Friday came nearly two weeks after he made his Cactus League debut then shut it down because of the injury, which occurred days earlier when he swung in batting practice. He also caught five innings in his return.

"It's great to see Buster back there," starter Jeff Samardzija said after the Giants beat the Mariners 10-7. "Obviously he's a real huge part of this whole equation. To have him healthy and back behind the plate, the way things are supposed to be, is always a good thing."

Posey cannot conjure a better word for his injury than a "tweak," which sounds innocuous. But this "tweak" required an MRI exam and cortisone shot. The pictures revealed no structural damage, and Posey reported little discomfort during his three times on base Friday, saying, "I'm pleased with it."

A bigger question is whether the injury will pester Posey all year.

“Who knows?” he said. “If I had to guess I’d say no. In 2012, after my injury, my ankle was cranky a lot. Sometimes you just play. None of us are playing 100 percent. You guys know that.”

With the Giants facing a left-hander, James Paxton, manager Bruce Bochy’s lineup hinted at his thoughts on an Opening Day lineup against the Dodgers’ Clayton Kershaw.

Austin Jackson led off with Hunter Pence batting second. Andrew McCutchen, Posey and Evan Longoria were to hit third, fourth and fifth until Longoria was scratched with stiffness in his left heel and ankle. Bochy said Longoria is day to day.

Bochy had left-handers Brandon Belt and Brandon Crawford at six and seven in the original lineup, with DH Pablo Sandoval eighth and Joe Panik ninth.

The key decision is having McCutchen, Posey and Longoria bat in that order.

After the game, Bochy said the three are “interchangeable” in the middle of the lineup, but suggested McCutchen would hit third because he can run more and Posey has had success batting cleanup.

“We’ve had meetings about this lineup,” Bochy said. “Between what we see, what we think and the analytics, we look at all that and go from there. All of them have a nose for RBIs. All are run producers.”

Bochy also reiterated that he is not inclined break up the three right-handed hitters with a lefty, such as Belt or Crawford, because all have hit righties well throughout their careers.

Bochy cautioned that he will continue to experiment with the lineup, which is not “etched in stone.”

Cepeda missed: A very important person was missing inside the Scottsdale Stadium clubhouse for the annual talk to the team by Giants legends.

Willie Mays, Willie McCovey and Barry Bonds addressed the team and acknowledged the absence of Orlando Cepeda, who remains in a Bay Area hospital recovering from a cardiac episode and a head injury from the resulting fall on Feb. 19.

Cepeda, 80, has been alert and spoke by phone last weekend to KNBR host Marty Lurie, who texts Cepeda a daily photo of himself and a special guest while Lurie wears a Cepeda-style Panama hat. Lurie said Cepeda gets a kick out of those.

“There’s a lot of respect for Orlando, especially what he’s going through right now, what his family is going through,” said center fielder Gregor Blanco, who was in the clubhouse for Friday’s talk.

“He was mentioned a couple of times. Orlando is such a great guy, so funny. Even for his age he brings so much energy, always laughing and talking to the young guys.”

Briefly: Catcher Hector Sanchez had a setback in his recovery from a hamstring injury and could miss another 1-2 weeks. ... Bochy said closer Mark Melancon is expected to pitch again Sunday. Henry Schulman is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer.

Giants 10, Mariners 7

Notable: Each team hit four homers on a hot afternoon at Scottsdale Stadium. **Brandon Belt, Josh Rutledge, Chris Shaw** and **Orlando Calixte** hit the Giants’ homers. Shaw’s nearly cleared the berm in right-center. **Dee Gordon** hit two for Seattle. ... **Jeff Samardzija** allowed three homers in the span of five hitters and five runs over four innings. He has surrendered 10 runs in 71/3 Cactus League innings as he develops a new curveball grip and different changeup. ... **Pablo Sandoval** went 3-for-3, with two right-handed singles. ... **Hunter Pence** is 1-for-15 after going 0-for-3 with two strikeouts.

Quotable: “I think I had more than him last year. The way he’s running bases it shouldn’t be that hard. He’ll read that, so somebody write it.”

— **Buster Posey** on whether he will steal more bases than **Brandon Crawford** as he did in 2017 (6-3).

Saturday’s games: Giants vs. Angels (SS), at Scottsdale, 1:05 p.m., KNBR. Giants vs. Angels (SS),

at Tempe, 1:05 p.m.

San Francisco Chronicle
Orlando Cepeda's absence felt as Giants greats address team
Henry Schulman

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. - A very important person was missing inside the Scottsdale Stadium clubhouse Friday morning for the annual talk to the team by Giants legends.

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"He was mentioned a couple of times. Orlando is such a great guy, so funny. Even for his age he brings so much energy, always laughing and talking to the young guys."

Blanco expressed hope that Cepeda will be in Arizona for next year's talk, saying, "That would be awesome."

San Francisco chronicle
Giants' Tomlinson trying to win a job after losing two close relatives
Henry Schulman

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. - It was not like Kelby Tomlinson to miss FanFest. He has been a team guy from the moment the Giants selected him in the 12th round of the 2011 draft and stuck a uniform on him.

Tomlinson had a good reason to stay home in Oklahoma, an incredibly sad one, too.

On Feb. 6, the Tuesday before FanFest, Tomlinson and his wife, Tiffany, learned that one of Tiffany's two brothers was killed at home in Burden, Kan., when the truck he was fixing accidentally shifted into gear and rolled over his head. T.J. Prater was 35.

"He was Tiffany's older brother, the guardian," Tomlinson said Friday morning. "To get to Tiffany I had to get him on my side. Once I got him, we were like best friends. We were really close."

Three days later, the night before Prater's funeral, Tomlinson got another call that his paternal grandfather, Harold Tomlinson, had died of kidney failure during the end stages of dementia. The family knew Tomlinson's grandpa was dying but did not tell Kelby for fear of overwhelming him after Prater's death.

Before Tomlinson flew to Arizona to start spring training, he attended two funerals in five days.

"Those were just two tough moments," Tomlinson said. "It just almost didn't seem real."

As with so many players when tragedy strikes, baseball was Tomlinson's soft landing spot. The 27-year-old walked into a clubhouse full of love and support, which he in turn needs to provide Tiffany even if she is "tough," as Tomlinson put it.

"It was kind of nice to get out here and get back to baseball and get your mind off things, just get going," Tomlinson said.

"I do remember the first time I was driving up to the field in spring training, I was thinking it's going to be different without T.J. He's one of my biggest fans. And he was always calling, always talking about the games, being in touch. Just not having him here is going to be a definitely different year."

Tomlinson will not grieve his grandfather any less, of course, but the loss of a young, healthy family man is always harder to accept. Prater and his wife Sheena had three girls, the oldest now 7, the youngest 7 months.

Prater cut hair for a living in an old-fashioned Midwestern barber shop, with the big metal chairs, a barber pole and straight razors for shaves - the perfect vocation for a gregarious fellow.

"He could just talk, man. He was everybody's best friend," Tomlinson said. "He had over 1,000 people at his funeral. He impacted people. He was just amazing. His wife said when they would go to Wal-Mart and they needed something that would take 5 minutes, he would be there like he was a politician running for mayor, and he wasn't even running for mayor. He cared about people, loved people."

Tiffany is with Kelby in Scottsdale. They've already had moments when they expected T.J. to walk through the door, or send a text, and needed that extra split second to realize it would not happen.

"That's when it gets hard," Tomlinson said.

One of those moments would have come Thursday night, when Tomlinson, playing shortstop, ranged deep into the hole and made a bazooka throw to first to retire a Seattle Mariner.

Tomlinson also had a couple of hits. He helped himself as he competes for a backup infield spot. He is guaranteed nothing, even after spending parts of three seasons in the majors, but could be the first among equals, especially if he continues that kind of shortstop play.

Having Brandon Crawford as a shoulder to lean on can't hurt. Crawford learned all too well in 2017 about leaving real life behind and competing at a high level.

"He's one of the best shortstops in the game, and I watch him all the time," Tomlinson said.

"Being behind him the last three years, I've gotten to be close to him. He's always somebody I look up to and try to imitate through life on the field and away from the field, too."

MLB.com

Posey reveals he has MRI, cortisone shot

Chris Haft

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Giants' **10-7 Cactus League** triumph on Friday over the Mariners at Scottsdale Stadium raised a couple of essential issues about **Buster Posey**: the frequency with which the All-Star catcher can play the game's most grueling position and, when he does play, the spot in the batting order that he'll occupy to maximize his offensive production.

Both, of course, will be subject to Posey's health -- the condition of his body -- as well as of his skills.

View Full Game Coverage

Posey spoke after his most extensive game activity of the spring, a five-inning stint in which he went 3-for-3. It marked his first game since Feb. 25, due to the Giants' caution regarding his left ankle injury.

Posey revealed that his ailment, which limited him to two innings and two at-bats in Cactus League games before Friday, required him to undergo an MRI and receive a cortisone shot shortly before the exhibition season began.

Posey, who referred to his injury as a "tweak," felt certain that his discomfort served as a reminder of the multiple injuries he sustained in his horrific May 25, 2011, home-plate collision with Scott Cousins of the Marlins.

"I'm sure it does," Posey said. "I would bet that it does."

The 30-year-old has avoided serious physical woes in six seasons since the collision. He started

at catcher in 99 games last year, a personal low for a full season. But that largely stemmed from first baseman **Brandon Belt**'s unavailability for the season's final 51 games after he was beamed. Posey started 18 of those games at first base.

Though Posey prefers to catch, "I've always gone into it with an open mind that I could see more time at first. My mindset is to prepare myself to catch every day and adjust from there."

Posey probably won't have to adjust to a new spot in the batting order. He'll likely hit fourth, the position he has occupied for most of his career. Against Seattle left-hander **James Paxton** on Friday, **Andrew McCutchen**, Posey and **Nick Hundley** were in the lineup batting third, fourth and fifth, respectively. **Evan Longoria** was initially penciled in for fifth but was scratched with stiffness in his left ankle.

"It doesn't matter where I hit," said Posey, who has started 692 games batting cleanup and 248 games from the third spot.

Still, get used to this trio batting together. Manager Bruce Bochy said that he won't hesitate to deploy McCutchen, Posey and Longoria consecutively, in some combination, even if a challenging right-handed starter is facing the Giants.

Some teams might throw in a left-handed batter for balance. However, Bochy doesn't feel compelled to follow that logic. He pointed out that this threesome doesn't need such assistance.

"You're talking about three guys who play every day [against] righties or lefties," Bochy said.

MLB.com

Samardzija refining curve, changeup deliveries

Chris Haft

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- **Jeff Samardzija**'s pitching line was filled with crooked numbers, as baseball people like to call digits other than one or zero. San Francisco's No. 3 starter, who's prone to yielding home runs, coughed up three of them -- all in the third inning -- in Friday's **10-7 Cactus League victory** over the Mariners at Scottsdale Stadium.

However, only one of the homers -- **Dee Gordon**'s two-run clout -- appeared to be a legitimate round-tripper. The others were products of the Arizona environment, where medium-deep fly balls receive added propulsion from the dry sky and occasional wind.

View Full Game Coverage

Was Samardzija vulnerable? Yes. Was he disappointed? No way.

Samardzija continued to refine his curveball and changeup while surrendering five runs on six hits in four innings. The right-hander remained optimistic about his new deliveries, convinced that they'll help him over the long haul.

"I think I threw some pretty good pitches," said Samardzija, who hiked his pitch count to 50 and flung 14 more in the bullpen to increase his stamina after being removed from the game.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy applauded Samardzija's approach.

"I want these guys working on something that's going to make them a better player or pitcher," Bochy said.

Longoria scratched

The Giants' hopes of using their projected starting lineup against left-handed pitching evaporated when they had to scratch third baseman **Evan Longoria**, who complained of left ankle stiffness.

Bochy indicated that the injury wasn't serious and said that Longoria should resume game activity in a day or two.

Posey, Crawford could renew running rivalry

Buster Posey spent a lot of time on the basepaths during his **3-for-3 effort**, prompting one reporter to ask him whether he planned to renew his stolen base competition with shortstop **Brandon Crawford**. Posey emerged triumphant last season, stealing six bases to Crawford's three.

"The way he's running bases, it shouldn't be that hard," Posey said. "He'll read that, so somebody write it."

Up next: Saturday will be one of the busiest afternoons of the spring for the Giants, who will play split-squad exhibitions against the Angels -- one at home in Scottsdale and the other at Tempe Diablo Stadium (**watch live on MLB.TV**). Left-hander **Andrew Suarez** will start for the Giants at home (12:05 p.m. PT), while **Tyler Beede** gets the Tempe assignment (12:10 p.m. PT).

The Athletic

Giants spring impressions: Posey gets back on the field after a cortisone shot, but lineup still isn't coming together

Andrew Baggarly

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. – Watch enough spring training games out here and you'll be reminded that most mirages happen in the desert.

The Giants and Mariners combined for eight home runs in Friday's exhibition game at Scottsdale Stadium. Dee Gordon accounted for two of them, and he hit all of two regular-season home runs last year. Orlando Calixte, that sultan of swat, parked one to the opposite field. Jeff Samardzija gave up three in a span of five batters.

None of it really means anything. Gordon probably won't challenge Giancarlo Stanton for a spot on the AL Home Run Derby squad in the All-Star Game. Samardzija is working on pitch sequences and adjusting his grips. The wind blew out briskly to center field.

(Give Chris Shaw credit for his mammoth shot, though, which might still be rolling on a back field.)

Bottom line: stir one part Cactus League results with one part margarita mix and you're left with a virgin margarita. The numbers don't matter at this stage.

What's more important are the impressions formed, the small signs here and there, the hitter's bat speed and the pitcher's arm speed and the outfielder's closing speed in the gap. Most important of all: being on the field and out of the trainer's room.

So with the exhibition season half over, and two weeks until camp breaks March 23, here is one reporter's collection of impressions:

The lineup

Friday's game was supposed to be the first time Bruce Bochy ran out a lineup that he could conceivably use in a regular-season game. And because the Mariners started left-hander James Paxton, and the Giants will gear up to face Dodgers left-hander Clayton Kershaw in the season opener at Dodger Stadium, it was (minus the DH) a lineup that we could see March 29.

Bochy lined it up this way: CF Austin Jackson, LF Hunter Pence, RF Andrew McCutchen, C Buster Posey, 3B Evan Longoria, 1B Brandon Belt, SS Brandon Crawford, DH Pablo Sandoval, 2B Joe Panik.

But then Longoria was scratched because of a sore left ankle. Bochy planned to give his third baseman another day to let it calm down.

At least Posey made it back onto the field for the first time since Feb. 25. He had been sidelined

because of soreness in his left ankle – the one he had surgically reconstructed after his season-ending collision at home plate in 2011, and that barked at him for parts of last season.

Posey said he had an MRI exam that showed no structural damage other than inflammation, and he had an injection to help the area calm down. He said he hopes the ankle has turned a corner and he expects to get his usual workload through the end of the spring.

“In 2012 after my injury, my ankle was cranky a lot,” Posey said. “So sometimes you just play. I mean, none of us are playing 100 percent.”

Posey is coming out swinging this spring. He hit two doubles and a bloop single Friday, mostly attacking the first pitch. He thanked Belt for hitting a home run that allowed him to trot home.

There’s nothing wrong with Posey’s sense of humor. Told he’ll need a healthy ankle to beat out Brandon Crawford in stolen bases again — which he did easily (by a tally of 6 to 3) last year — Posey chuckled.

“The way he’s running bases, it shouldn’t be that hard,” Posey said. “And he’ll read that, so will somebody write it down, please?”

Posey’s ankle, given its history, should warrant more concern than Longoria’s current issue. No major leaguer has played in more games over the last five seasons than Longoria, and his durability was a major reason the Giants sought to acquire him. Spring training scratches are not the same as a late lineup change in April or September.

But it’s getting to be time that Bochy can see most of his regulars alongside one another. It’s important that they get a feel for hitting behind one another, appreciating their strengths and weaknesses, and learn to trust the next guy. “Keep the line moving” is a favorite Bochysm. It starts with assembling that line.

Although Bochy said he plans to try different lineups this spring, it’s looking more and more certain that he plans to hit McCutchen, Posey and Longoria in the 3-4-5 slots and likely in that order. He isn’t concerned with breaking up those right-handed bats because these are three hitters who play every day with no regard to platoon splits.

“We’ve had meetings,” Bochy said. “We’ve talked about what we see and what we think and add in the analytics. They all have a nose for an RBI. They’ve all been run producers. Really, they’re interchangeable. I don’t think it’d be different if Buster hit third and Longo fourth, or even put McCutchen in the 4-hole. There’s not one thing that stands out.”

While it might seem a curious choice to bat Posey cleanup, considering he hit two homers after the All-Star break last year and three following the break the year before, Bochy appears to be leaning in that direction.

“He has been our cleanup hitter and we’ve had a lot of success with him there,” Bochy said.

Posey has 4,260 plate appearances: 25 percent hitting third and 69 percent hitting fourth.

Longoria has 6,151 career plate appearances: 61 percent hitting third, 31 percent hitting fourth and 6 percent hitting fifth.

McCutchen has 5,829 career plate appearances: 18 percent hitting first, 6 percent hitting second, 71 percent hitting third and 2 percent hitting fourth.

“All three spots are important in the lineup,” Bochy said. “It’s hard to say which one is more important. Analytics will tell you the 3-hole is the place maybe you shouldn’t have your best hitter.”

It might be the best place for McCutchen, who runs the best of the three. He’ll be better equipped to score from first base on an extra-base hit or from second on a single. And Bochy might be able to put him in motion on occasion to help Posey stay out of double plays.

But theories are theories. The only way you get a feel for the best combination is to roll out the lineup and see how it plays. To this point in the spring, Bochy hasn’t been able to do that.

Longoria

You learn a lot from watching an infielder take ground balls and the best fielders almost give you a sense that their glove is a vacuum. Longoria gives you that sense. His hands are tremendously soft, and he moves very well to his right.

Crawford probably had his best defensive season in 2015, when Matt Duffy played third base like a shortstop and freed him up to position himself more aggressively. Longoria could have the same effect on the Giants infield this season.

Pence

He’s 1 for 15 with seven strikeouts, which is not a surprise given some of the adjustments he is attempting to incorporate. Pence has moved nearer to the plate and he is striding toward the pitcher instead of stepping “in the bucket” – or out toward third base – in an effort to keep from pulling off pitches and cover the outside part of the plate. Of course, this will leave him more susceptible to getting busted inside, and that’s where the Mariners were pitching him Friday.

A greater concern might be how deep Pence is playing in left field, which is going to make it a lot easier for singles to fall in front of him and for opposing third base coaches to wave home runners from second base. At 35 and making a positional adjustment, it’s hard to ask Pence to play shallow and go back on balls like a 25-year-old. But look around the league and you’ll find that your more athletic outfielders are able to play super shallow and take away more singles (or prevent that extra 90 feet of advancement). The Giants do not play shallow at any spot.

The outfield defense should be improved, but do not expect it to be an asset. And there's a pretty good chance that Pence will be lifted for a defensive replacement in the late innings.

Kelby Tomlinson

Kelby didn't need a great spring to make the team as a backup infielder. There aren't many other players in camp who could handle shortstop when Crawford takes a day off. But Tomlinson probably couldn't afford to have a bad spring, either.

Unfortunately, this spring has been terrible for so many more important reasons than baseball. First, his brother-in-law died in a tragic accident when he was working on a truck that slipped out of gear and crushed him. Then his grandfather passed away in the same week.

Perhaps baseball will serve as a haven of sorts. Tomlinson had a great game on Thursday, rifling a pair of singles to right field and stealing a base. Some positive results had to feel good.

Mac Williamson

I'm not sure why so many Giants fans (or at least the magpies on Twitter) are so eager to punt on Williamson, who still has a minor league option remaining and showed so much upside with his power and on-base skills in the minor leagues.

But he's working to replicate Justin Turner's stride and swing, and he really has impressed thus far with his timing and the quality of contact he's making. Williamson is batting .379 with three homers and two doubles among his 11 hits.

He has a minor league option and knows he'll open the season at Triple-A Sacramento. But he is having the kind of spring that will make him one of the first players called up when the Giants have a need. He certainly looks more equipped mentally and physically to take advantage of an opportunity when he gets one.

Gregor Blanco

He's 7 for 13 and I'm pretty sure he made the team in the second exhibition game, when he flew around the bases after hitting a triple at Camelback Ranch. He hasn't lost a step from the time he was a non-roster player in camp with the Giants six years ago. Of players with any big league time, Blanco is the most capable defensive center fielder in this camp. Again, I'm pretty sure he has to make this team.

Jarrett Parker

He should have a huge advantage to be on the Opening Day roster because he is out of minor league options and teams are always motivated to protect their inventory and depth. But he's

also batting .192 with 15 strikeouts in 26 at-bats. Think the Giants need to be worried about someone claiming him on waivers?

Steven Duggar

He does everything well in the outfield. He has closing speed. He gets good reads and jumps. He has plus arm strength, and when's the last time the Giants had a center fielder with any of that?

But to break with this team, he pretty much has to destroy the Cactus League the way that Brandon Belt did in 2011. I'm not sure we're seeing that, even though he's held his own.

Pablo Sandoval

He's in acceptable shape. He's moving well at first base and looking serviceable at third. He's happy to be here. Everyone else seems to be happy he's here, too. He probably won't have many chances to employ his right-handed swing, but he offers left-handed power off the bench – something that makes him rather unique in this camp. The Giants are sure to get their money's worth out of the Panda this season, and they might even have struck a bit of gold. It's pretty clear he is still dangerous against right-handed pitching.

Hector Sanchez and Trevor Brown

Sanchez had a setback as he began to restart baseball activities following a two-week timeout on his injured hamstring. He is still dealing with soreness. That makes Brown more than a mere afterthought following a lost season in 2017. The Giants might need him for catching depth at Sacramento. He doubled on Thursday and Bochy sees a different, more confident player again.

The bullpen

Cory Gearrin, Josh Osich, Steven Okert, Hunter Strickland and Sam Dyson have combined for 16 appearances and allowed two runs over 15 2/3 innings. One of those runs came Friday when Dyson served up one of those wind-aided homers to Gordon.

Osich is ditching his cutter and curve and throwing fastball-changeup, and as much as he has struggled the last two years, he still has so much upside when he's right and confident.

Ty Blach and Chris Stratton

Dare we suggest the back end of the rotation could turn into a strength? It's hard to pick out which one of these two pitchers has been more impressive this spring. Beyond the stuff, though, Stratton and Blach are putting off a different air in Scottsdale. You can tell that they are confident they belong in the big leagues and can succeed here.

Madison Bumgarner and Johnny Cueto

The Giants need their two frontline starters to pitch like aces again this season. There's no path to contention without that ingredient. So far this spring, so good.

Julian Fernandez

The hard-throwing Rule 5 pick really struggled in his first two outings, giving up four runs each time while retiring a total of one batter. But he showed why the Giants plucked him from the Rockies system on Thursday at Peoria, flashing 97-98 mph heat and then freezing a batter with a hard curve.

The Giants still plan to open with a 12-man pitching staff, with the potential for Blach or Stratton to open in relief because the club won't need to use a fifth starter within the first 10 days of the season. That could give the Giants an avenue to keep Fernandez. But it remains a hard task since the right-hander must be offered back to the Rockies if he isn't on the Giants' major league roster all season.

Sometimes, a rebuilding team will stash a pitcher for a season. The Giants plan to be a contending team. For this experiment to work, Fernandez must convince them that he could be a functional part of their bullpen. So he is one of the bigger variables still in play as we handicap this roster. A few more outings like Thursday night's game will cause the Giants to think harder about keeping him.

Tyler Rogers

He isn't in big league camp, but the reliever has impressed in a couple of exhibition appearances and could be someone we'll see at some point this season. If so, Tyler would join his twin brother, Taylor, as the first set of twins to appear in the big leagues since Damon and Ryan Minor in the early 1990s. (And of course, you had Jose and Ozzie Canseco before that.)

Damon is the hitting coach at Triple-A Sacramento. He was a lefty-hitting first baseman and Ryan was a right-handed infielder. Oddly enough, Tyler is a right-handed pitcher with a knuckle-dragging, submarine delivery while Taylor a left-handed reliever with the Minnesota Twins who throws from over the top.

We reporters always root for the story. So I'll be rooting for Tyler Rogers.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Samardzija spends the spring tweaking his pitch mix: 'The older you get...'

Alex Pavlovic

SCOTTSDALE — Jeff Samardzija gave up three homers in the third inning Friday. He shrugged it off.

Forget about the hot weather and short porch in right field. Spring training is about experimenting for Samardzija, and this spring he's trying to add two more looks to a pitch mix that already is pretty versatile. Samardzija changed the grip on his curveball to try and give it more spin, and he said he also has added a second, more traditional changeup.

This is all in addition to the three different types of fastballs he throws — four-seam, two-seam, cutter — the slider, and his splitter, which previously acted as a changeup and now will be more of an out-pitch, he said.

"The older you get, that's part of the game that you get to," Samardzija said. "Warming up in the first inning, you realize what is working that day and you adjust accordingly. Buster (Posey) has always been great with that and keeping pitches out of (that day's rotation) if he doesn't like the way it's going."

Samardzija said he'll go into a game with 8-10 variations of pitches depending on grips, but the end goal of most of the tweaks seems to be the same.

"People are sitting fastball on me," he said.

Because so many of Samardzija's pitches are in a similar velocity range, he sometimes can get hit around a bit. The new curveball is more of a spike curve, and Samardzija said he wants it to look like his four-seam fastball coming out of his hand before dipping. The new changeup felt good Friday, he said.

"It's something he's played around with in the past and so far it looks good," Posey said.

--- The wait continues for Bruce Bochy, who had hoped to have his full squad on the field Friday against the Mariners.

With Posey finally cleared, Bochy had penned a lineup card that included all of the projected opening day starters, but Evan Longoria was a late scratch with left ankle stiffness. He's expected to miss a day or two.

--- Ryder Jones (hamstring) is expected to return to the field in a couple of days. Hector Sanchez had a setback with his hamstring issue and could be out another week or two.

--- From earlier today, Posey admitted **he got a cortisone shot in his left ankle**. But he feels good, and the results at the plate look familiar.

--- Also, a story on why **Game 162 was so meaningful to Cory Gerrin last year**.

--- The latest podcast is a conversation with Heliot Ramos and Jacob Gonzalez, the top two picks in last year's draft. They've become close friends and hope to sail through the minors together. You can **download it on iTunes here** or **stream it here**.

--- There's a **familiar face in camp** this week as a guest instructor. He also visited the minor league camp the other day to speak to prospects.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Buster Posey collects three hits in return, says MRI came back clean

Alex Pavlovic

SCOTTSDALE — Buster Posey has seen fewer than 10 pitches in five at-bats this spring, but that has nothing to do with wanting to keep his bothersome left ankle off the hard dirt of the desert. Posey prefers to swing away in spring training and make sure he gets plenty of opportunities to lock his swing into place.

As for that ankle, Posey admitted that he had a cortisone shot recently to calm some of the discomfort, but an MRI came back clean. The ankle is the same one that was surgically repaired in 2011, and while it held up for years, Posey did deal with some discomfort last season.

"In 2012, after my injury, my ankle was cranky a lot," Posey said. "Sometimes you just play. Most of us are not playing at 100 percent."

The Giants describe Posey's injury with light terms, even when he misses several games in a row. This latest flareup has been described as a "tweak" by Posey and manager Bruce Bochy. Posey doesn't think it'll turn into anything more, and he expects to be in the lineup on Sunday and have a normal spring going forward.

Posey had not started since Feb. 25 but he didn't waste any time getting back into the mix. He doubled to the right field corner in his first at-bat and trotted home when Brandon Belt followed with a homer. In the fourth inning, Posey flared a single to center. He doubled in his final at-bat.